DURGESA NANDINI

OR

The Chieftain's Daughter

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**VICEROY AND GOVERNOR-GENERAL
OF INDIA.**

DURGESA NANDINI

OR

THE CHIEFTAIN'S DAUGHTER

A BENGALI ROMANCE BY BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH PROSE

BY

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DURGEŚA-NANDINÍ,

OR

THE CHIEFTAIN'S DAUGHTER.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE TEMPLE.

One day, near the end of summer, in the year 998 of the Bengali era, a solitary horseman was journeying along the road which leads from Vishnupur to Jehanabad. Seeing that the sun was about to set, he began to gallop ; for before him lay a long, lonesome, unshaded road, and if the evening should bring with it one of those thunder-storms so frequent at that season of the year, it would go hard with him in that shelterless place. By degrees the twilight sky was overspread with masses of dark clouds. As early as nightfall, such dense darkness enveloped the landscape that the guiding of the horse became extremely difficult; and the traveller could only with difficulty follow the path shown by the lightning flash. In a short time, the winds began to roar, accompanied by heavy rain. The horseman was now absolutely incapable of distinguishing his course. The reins were now slackened, and the animal went his

own way. After going some distance in this manner, the charger stumbled at some hard substance. As the lightning played just then, the traveller caught a glimpse of some gigantic white object before him. Taking it to be a building, he jumped to the ground, and came to know that some stone stairs had occasioned the accident. Hence concluding shelter to be at hand, he let his horse loose, and in darkness cautiously began to ascend the flight of steps. By the help of the lightning he soon ascertained that the pile before him was a temple. He adroitly reached its little door, but found it shut. He felt it about with his hand and perceived that it was not fastened outside. "In this temple, situated as it is in an uninhabited, solitary tract, who can have fastened the door within?"—the traveller asked himself with some surprise and curiosity. But the rain was beating pitilessly against his head, so that be the occupant whoever he might, the traveller fell to rapping at the door violently with his hand, again and again. But in vain. Irresistibly prompted to break it open by kicking, he refrained from going so far, lest thereby he should commit an act of graceless sacrilege. But notwithstanding this forbearance of his, the violence of his blows was such that the frail wooden thing was not able to bear it long—shortly it was deprived of its fastening pin. On the door being flung open, as the young man entered the temple, a faint shriek, issuing from it, entered his ear; and immediately a gust, rushing in, blew out the lamp which had been burning there. Who was in the temple and what the image of the god?—the newcomer could not at all determine. Finding himself thus placed, the dauntless young man only smiled, and

first reverentially bowed down his head before the invisible image. He then arose and in darkness spoke, "Who's there in the temple ?" No answer ; but the tinkling of ornaments was heard. Thinking it useless to waste words, the traveller then closed the door in order to keep out the wind and rain, and in place of the broken pin leaned against it. "Whoever you may be, here," again said he, "listen. Here I sit at the door armed. Do not break my rest, or do it at your own peril, if you should happen to belong to the stronger sex. But if you be women, never fear ; so long as sword and buckler are in the hands of a Rajput, not a hair of your head shall come to grief."

"Who are you, sir ?" was the question in a female voice.

The traveller answered in surprise, "From the voice I gather this is asked by some fair one. What's the use, madam, of your knowing me ?"

"O sir, we were so frightened !" answered the voice.

"Whoever I may be," replied the young man, "it is not our custom to make ourselves known by our own mouth. But rest content that so long as I am here, no danger shall befall the weaker sex."

"I take heart at your words, sir," said the woman. "Till now we were almost dying of fright. My companion has yet not completely recovered from her swoon. In the evening we came to worship this *Siva*, called Saileswara. Afterwards when the storm broke out, our bearers and attendants left us and have gone, we know not where."

"Be of good cheer, madam, I pray you," said our young man. "Rest here for the present. To-morrow morning I will conduct you home."

"The blessings of Saileswara upon you, sir!", returned the woman.

At midnight when the storm ceased, the young man said, "Madam, please stay here alone for a while, summoning up courage. I'll just go and procure a lamp from the nearest village."

At this the female interlocutor returned, "Sir, you needn't go so far. The keeper of this temple, a menial, lives close by. The moonlight has now appeared, so that you will be able to see his hovel on going out. This man lives alone in this lonely region and has always by him articles for lighting a fire."

Accordingly the young man went out and in the moonlight discovered the dwelling of the keeper. Coming to the door of his habitation, our traveller awakened him. The man, not opening the door at once from fear, began at first to peep out to ascertain who it was that had come. On close examination, no signs of a robber were recognisable in the traveller; moreover, it was not so easy for the former to overcome the temptation of gold held out by the latter. After some balancing, the keeper opened the door and lighted a lamp.

Having brought in the light, the traveller saw that an image of *Siva*, made of white marble was established in the temple. Behind it were two women only. The more youthful of them, on seeing the light, sat down veiling herself, and looking down. But from the diamond-studded *Marwari** bangles that shone on her wrists and from her embroidered dress of exquisite workmanship, over which were displayed tastefully her jewelled ornaments, the traveller could clearly infer that she came of no mean

* Marwar, a province in Rajputana, is famous for its jewelled bangles.

family. From the comparatively inferior value of the second woman's dress, he concluded her to be the hand-maid of the young lady, yet more well-to-do than the ordinary run of maid-servants. Her age might be thirty-five. Naturally it appeared to the young man that he was speaking to the matron. He also remarked with surprise that the dress of neither was like that of Bengali women, both being attired after the fashion of the North-Western or Hindustani females.

After placing the lamp in its place, the young man stood facing the women. Then, as the rays of light fell full on his head, the ladies perceived that his age might be slightly over five and twenty. His body was of such a height as would not have looked beautiful in another, but owing to the young man's broad chest and the symmetrical largeness and fulness of every member, his tallness contributed singularly to his beauty. Over a complexion, like the hue of the tender grass brought forth by the rainy season, or rather like the more captivating color of the fresh, spring leaves, shone amulets and other ornaments worn by the Rajputs. Over his loins hung his sheathed sword fastened to the girdle; in his long arm was a long spear; a turban, crested with a diamond, was on his head; from his ears hung pearl ear-rings; a jewelled neck-lace completed his dress. On viewing each other, both parties were eager for acquaintance, but neither could bring itself to stoop to the indecorum of making advances to the other.

CHAPTER II.

ACQUAINTANCE.

The young man was the first to betray his curiosity. Addressing the dame, "I presume, madam," said he, "you belong to the *zenānā* of some respectable person. I should scruple to ask for your name and lineage, but you may not have the same objection that I have to make myself known. May I therefore take the liberty to enquire who you are?"

"No, sir," replied the woman, "that can not be. When do women first make themselves known?"

"What does precedence in acquaintance signify?" rejoined the young man.

"And how, I pray, is a woman to make herself known—she who is not allowed to bear her caste addition? How can she, whose virtue consists in living shut up from the world, disclose herself? When God forbade woman to utter her husband's name, didn't He thereby deprive her of the power of discovering herself?"*

The young man returned no answer to these words; in fact, he was otherwise engaged. By degrees removing part of her veil, the youthful lady had been gazing at him steadfastly from behind

* The woman, with the native simplicity which characterizes her sex, makes her own world, the measure of womankind in general, with a confidence which such simplicity alone inspires. With what charming *naiveté* she alludes to the Hindu female seclusion, &c. as facts obtaining with all women, irrespective of creed or color.

within a few miles of that village. Filled with apprehensions, the Raja thought it expedient to despatch an officer to ascertain the actual state of affairs—where the enemy lay, what his aim, what he was doing, &c. His favorite son, Jagat Singha, had accompanied him in this expedition. Learning that the Prince was eager to be entrusted with this bold task, the Raja had despatched him with a hundred horsemen, in the direction of the enemy. The Prince returned soon, after performing his work. It was when he was journeying back to the camp, that he has been introduced to the gentle reader.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUTHFUL GENERAL.

When Jagat Singha returned to his father, Maharaja Man Singha learnt from the lips of his son that an army of about fifty thousand Pathans had encamped near the village of Dharpur, that they were plundering the neighbouring villages, and that having raised or captured forts, they were lying unmolested. Man Singha saw that a speedy check must be put on the excesses of the Pathans ; but that this was a task of no small difficulty. With the view of deciding the appropriate course to be followed, he took counsel with the officers who had accompanied the expedition.

"Day after day," said he, "village after village, Pargana after Pargana are slipping off from the hands of the Emperor. Now, the Pathans must be chastised. But how to do this ? The

odds are against us—further, the enemy will fight from the shelter of forts ; so that even if we could beat them, they could not be crushed or dislodged. But, mark, if on the contrary we are worsted, we shall be at once annihilated in this shelterless region of the enemy. Therefore, methinks, it would be a piece of hair-brained bravado to risk the lives of so many of the Emperor's troops, as also to blight once for all the prospect of conquering Orissa. To wait for Syed Khan, then, seems to be the best course ; but then, in the meanwhile, some speedy means must be resorted to, for keeping the enemy in some check. What do you advise, Sirs ?"

All the old officers returned with one voice that to wait for Syed Khan seemed the best course.

Raja Man Singha said, "Instead of risking the whole army, my intention is to send a small force under some able officer."

"Maharaj," replied an old officer, "where you are afraid to send the whole army, what will a detachment avail ?"

"I don't mean to send it," rejoined Man Singha, "to face the enemy in the open field. A small force lying concealed will be able to keep in check small bands of Pathans who are harassing the villages."

"Maharaj," answered the Mogal, "what officer will court certain destruction ?"

Man Singha scowled. "What ?" said he, "breathes there not one among so many Rajputs and Mogals who can look on death with scorn ?"

Immediately a few Mogals and Rajputs started up, and expressed their readiness to go. Jagat Singha was present there. He was the youngest of all. From behind the others, he also

said, "With your permission, Sir, I am also willing to do the Emperor's business."

"Ah! why shouldn't it be so?" said Man Singha with complacence. "Now, I know the day is yet distant when the name of either Rajput or Mogal will be a thing of the past. So you are all ready to undertake this perilous task? Now, whom shall I select?"

"Maharaj," replied a courtier laughing, "'tis fortunate that so many have come forward. Pray, Sir, make the most of this competition, and select him who agrees to take the fewest men."

"Aye!" replied the Raja, "this is sound advice." He then asked the first that had volunteered, "With what number are you willing to go?"

"With fifteen thousand, so please you."

"Nay, that can't be. If fifteen thousand were detached, a sufficient number would not be left behind What gallant is ready to take ten thousand?"

The officers were silent. At length Yasovantha Singha, a Rajput warrior and favorite of the Raja, solicited his permission to be placed in command. The Raja now began to eye them round with satisfaction. Prince Jagat Singha had been standing courting his glance, and as the Raja's gaze fell on him, he humbly said,

"Maharaj, under your favor, with the help of five thousand, I can engage to drive away Katlu Khan to the other side of the Subarnarekha."

Man Singha was struck dumb; the officers began to whisper to one another. "My son," said he after a while, "I know you are the pride of the Rajput race, but, child, you are rash."

Jagat Singha supplicated with clasped hands,

"Sire, if instead of redeeming my word, I waste the Emperor's troops, let me meet with condign punishment."

After thinking a while, the Raja said,

"God forbid that I should hinder the free exercise of your Rajput virtue. Look! here I entrust you with this business."

Saying this, he embraced the Prince with much feeling and bade him farewell.

CHAPTER V.

GARMANDARAN.

The traces of the road along which Jagat Singha returned from Vishnupur to Jahanabad, still exist. At some distance to the south of it, is the village of *Garmandaran*. The women whom Jagat Singha met in the temple, went towards this village. Several ancient forts were situated in *Garmandaran*, which may probably have owed its name to that circumstance. The river Amodara flowed through it. At one place, it so much deviated from the right line, that two sides of a triangular piece of land were completely surrounded; on the third, rose a rock-cut fort. At the head of this piece of land, and just where the river first entered, rose a stupendous castle from the water, piercing Heaven. The pile was composed entirely of black stone. The strong current laved its two sides. The traveller still sees the massive ruins of this impregnable fortress;—only the lower part now remains, the building having been reduced to a heap of ruins by the destructive

hand of Time. Over it, the tamarind, the *madhabi* and various other wild trees and shrubs have formed themselves into a wood, which affords shelter to the snake, the wolf and other ferocious beasts. Several other forts were situated on the other side of the river. These were inhabited by certain wealthy persons belonging to the same family. But our story has no connection with any other besides the first.

When Balin, the Emperor of Delhi, came to conquer Bengal, a soldier named Jayadhar Singha accompanied him. The night on which Balin obtained victory, the soldier performed prodigies of valor for the Imperial cause. In reward of his services, the Emperor gave him a *Jaigir* in the village of *Garmandaran*. The descendants of this Jaigirdar grew powerful, constructed forts at their own pleasure, and bade defiance to the ruler of Bengal. In 998 of the Bengali era, the castle which I have described in detail was inhabited by Virendra Singha, a descendant of Jayadhar Singha.

In his young days, Virendra was not on good terms with his father. He was of a haughty and impatient temperament, and seldom or never acted up to the wishes of his parent. Hence quarrel and altercation frequently ensued between the father and the son. The old land-holder fixed his choice on the daughter of a neighbour, also a land-holder and belonging to the same caste. The father of the girl had no son, so that by this alliance, Virendra could in all probability increase his fortunes. The bride too was beautiful. The match was therefore in every way highly acceptable in the eyes of the old man, and he accordingly made preparations for the coming ceremony. But instead of caring for all this, Virendra clandestinely married the daughter of a poor and forlorn

widow who lived in the neighbourhood. When intelligence of this *mesalliance* reached the ears of the land-holder, he drove out his son in a fit of rage. Driven out from his father's house, the young man set out for Delhi with the intention of entering the army. His spouse was then in the family way, and he could not take her with him ;. she remained in her mother's cottage.

Now, when his son had gone away, the old land-holder began to lament over the separation, and became a prey to remorse. He assiduously tried every means to get news of his child ;—but in vain. Failing in his endeavours, he welcomed his daughter-in-law with open arms, and brought her from the house of her poor mother. In time, the wife of Virendra Singha, gave birth to a daughter, and died after a few days.

On arriving at Delhi, Virendra embraced the military profession and entered the Rajput army of the Emperor. In a short time, he rose to a high rank through his abilities. After having in several years acquired wealth and distinction, he received the tidings of his father's demise. Considering it further unnecessary to remain in a distant land, or to serve, he returned home. He brought many persons with him from Delhi—among whom were a maid servant and an ascetic. In the following story we shall have to do with these two only. The maid-servant was called Bimala, the name of the ascetic was Abhiram Swami.

We have before called Bimala a maid-servant, we shall also do so now. The report ran that she was the paid servant of Virendra. She managed the house-hold affairs, and in particular tended Virendra's daughter,—no other reason was visible for her stay in the castle. I am therefore obliged to call her a maid-servant. But for all this, no signs were visible in her of the maid-

servant. She was respected by the inmates as a house-wife; all of them rendered obedience to her. From her countenance, she appeared to have been surpassingly fair in her youth—a ray of that beauty still lingered, like the setting moon in the 'sweet hour of prime.' Gajapati Vidyadiggaja, a disciple of Abhiram Swami, was an inmate of the castle. Whatever his attainments in Rhetoric, he had an inordinate thirst to display his wit and to pass for a wag. "The goodly maid-servant," he used to say, seeing Bimala, "is like a pail of clarified butter: as love's fire is cooling more and more, her frame is getting more and more compact." Here it should be remarked that from the day when he happened to make this display of his wit, Bimala nicknamed him "*Rasikdas Swami*" (illustrious bond-slave of gallantry). Form and bearing apart, Bimala's civility and conversation were such as could by no means be expected from an ordinary maid-servant. Many people said that for a long time she was an inmate of the Emperor's *Zenana*. Whether the report was true or false, Bimala alone could say; but she was never known to allude to the subject.

Was Bimala a widow? Who knows? She wore ornaments,* did not fast like widows, and in other ways behaved like a woman in wife-hood.

That she cherished Tilottama, the Chieftain's Daughter, with real affection, her conduct in the temple has clearly showed. Tilottama returned her love. The other follower of Virendra Singha, Abhiram Swami, did not always remain in the fortress. He often travelled, spending a month or two in *Garman-*

* Hindu widows fast on the eleventh day of the new and the eleventh day of the full moon, and do not wear ornaments.

daran, a month or two on the journey. The inmates and other people believed him to be Virendra Singha's spiritual guide—and very truly, to all appearance, considering the homage Virendra paid him. Nay, he did not transact any of his domestic affairs, without previously consulting Abhiram Swami,—and the advice given by his spiritual guide was almost always successful. The fact was that Abhiram Swami was a man of experience and possessed an acute intellect. Moreover, by virtue of his austerities, he had learnt to control his passions in almost all worldly transactions: when required, he could master his passion and go through the business calmly. Under such circumstances, what wonder that his advice would be more effectual than the schemes of the impatient and haughty Virendra Singha?

Besides Bimala and Abhiram Swami, a maid-servant, named Ashmani, had come with Virendra Singha.

CHAPTER VI.

ABHIRAM SWAMI'S COUNSEL.

Tilottama and Bimala reached home in safety. Some three or four days after this, Virendra Singha was seated in his steward's Office on a *masnad*, when Abhiram Swami entered. Virendra Singha rose from his *masnad*, and Abhiram Swami sat down upon a seat of the *kusa** grass handed by Virendra, who then resumed his seat with the Swami's permission.

* The sacred grass used at certain religious ceremonies.

"Virendra," said Abhiram Swami, "to-day I have some very important talk with you."

"I am at your service, Sir," replied Virendra Singha.

"A great war is about to break out between the Mogals and the Pathans."

"Yes, Sir; some serious event is likely to ensue."

Abhiram. "Likely. Now, what have you determined on for yourself?"

"This arm"—replied Virendra haughtily—"This arm will quell the enemy, should he come."

"Virendra" said the ascetic still more mildly, "this reply doubtless befits a warrior like you; but you must know that victory is not gained by feats of heroism only—it is gained by observing the principles regulating peace and war. You are yourself one of the first of heroes; but your force numbers not more than a thousand men. What warrior ever can with such a force beat an army a hundred times its number? Both the Mogals and the Pathans are vastly superior to you in point of number. How can you then hope to escape the hands of the one, unless you secure the assistance of the other? Pray, don't be angry at my words. Consider the matter calmly. Further, what's the use of being hostile to both. An enemy is an undoubted evil. Why then have two instead of one? In my opinion, therefore, you should choose between the parties."

"Which party," said Virendra after a long pause, "would you have me join, Sir?"

"'Victory aye attends the banner of Right,' says the adage. Side with that party which is in the right. Rebellion is no common sin; embrace the Sovereign's cause."

"Who is the Sovereign, I pray ?" asked Virendra after reflection. "Are not both the Mogals and the Pathans contesting for empire ?"

"He who takes tribute is the Sovereign," said Abhiram Swami.

Virendra. "Akbar Shah ?"

Abhiram Swami. "Of course."

At this, Virendra's countenance showed signs of displeasure ; by and bye his eyes reddened. Seeing these signs, Abhiram Swami said,

"Virendra, suppress your anger. I tell you to follow the Emperor of Delhi—not Man Singha."

Virendra stretched out his right hand, and pointing to it with a finger of the left, said,

"By your blessings, Sire, this hand I will drown in Man Singha's gore."

"Be calm," said Abhiram Swami. "Don't mar your interest through passion. By all means punish Man Singha for the old wrong. But why should you be unfriendly with Akbar Shah ?"

"If I were to side with the Emperor," said Virendra in a rage, "what general shall I have to fight under—whom shall I have to aid—whom shall I have to respect ? Man Singha ? No Sire,—Virendra Singha is incapable of so base an action so long as he lives."

Abhiram Swami was silent in dejection.

"Then," asked he after a while, "Then you think it preferable to join the Pathans ?"

"Is it necessary for me to choose between the parties ?" enquired Virendra.

Abhiram. "Yes, it is."

Virendra. "Then I must join the Pathans."

Abhiram Swami heaved a sigh, and was again silent; a tear stood in his eyes.

"Forgive my transgression, Sire," said Virendra Singha, greatly surprised. "I beseech you, let me know what offence I have been unknowingly guilty of."

Abhiram Swami wiped his eyes with his sheet, and said, "Listen. For several days, I have been engaged in astrological calculations. You know your daughter is an object of greater affection to me than yourself. I naturally made various calculations concerning her." Here Virendra looked blank; eagerly he asked, "Pray, what have you found by your calculation, Sir?"

"Great harm to Tilottama from a Mogal officer."

A cloud overspread Virendra's face.

"It is only when the Mogals are your enemy," went on the Swami, "that any danger may proceed from that source—not if you be friendly to them. It is for this reason that I was persuading you to side the Mogals. It was not my intention to pain you by this disclosure; but human endeavours avail not—methinks, the decrees of fate must take effect—why else should you be so determined?"

Virendra Singha remained mute.

"Virendra," said Abhiram Swami, "the ambassador of Katlu Khan is at the gate. It is because I saw him that I have come to you. Owing to my prohibition, the guards have not so long allowed him to come before you. I have now said my say. You may now summon him and return fit answer."

Virendra Singha raised his head with a sigh.

"Sire! so long as I did not see Tilottama," said he, "I did

not so much as think of her as my daughter. Now, I have none in this world save her. I bow to your command—I will forget the past—I will follow Man Singha. Let the porter usher in the ambassador."

In accordance with this order, the porter brought in the envoy. He handed a letter from Katlu Khan. Its purport was that Virendra Singha should send a force of a thousand horsemen and five thousand gold mohurs to Katlu Khan, otherwise he would send an army of twenty thousand men to *Garmandaran*.

Virendra read the note and said, "Envoy, let your master send his army."

The man bowed low and went away. Bimala had played the eaves-dropper all through the conversation.

CHAPTER VII.

CARELESSNESS.

Sitting at a window of a chamber belonging to that part of the castle by the base of which, the river Amodara flowed past, murmuring, Tilottama was listlessly gazing at an eddy of the stream. It was evening; and those clouds that had been painted in gold in the western sky by the mellow rays of the setting sun, were dancing under the ever-flowing water. The lofty buildings and the tall trees on the opposite bank were painted on the clear canvass of heaven. Within the castle the peacock, the Indian crane and various other birds were crying in sweet confusion—

sometimes, a bird busy in quest of its nest at the approach of night, was so silently winging its airy way beneath the firmament. After gently waving the mangoe-grove and touching the waters of the Amodara, the cool, grateful summer breeze was playing with the ringlets of Tilottama's hair, or with the cloth which fell so gracefully over her shoulders. Tilottama was a beauty, and how do I wish to hold up to the gaze of the gentle reader her matchless perfections! But O vain wish! Courteous reader, have you ever in your 'young days' seen, with a lover's eye, the fresh-budding loveliness of a calm, gentle, soft maiden, whose dear image has stamped itself indelibly on your memory and imagination—whose sylph-like form keeps aye gliding in and out as if in a dream—in your youth, manhood and old age; in your busy moments and in your repose; alike when you sleep and when you wake; yet which for all this, leaves not a tinge of impurity behind it—have you, gentle reader, seen such a maiden? If you have, then only you will be able to conceive what Tilottama was like. That form which illuminates our mental darkness, through the profusion of its radiant charms—that form which through the perfection of its arch playfulness plants its poisonous tooth into our heart, our heroine had not. Hers was that form which through its deliciously soft graces, instills the dew of gladness into the mind—that form which keeps so gently waving in the imagination like a shrub lightly stirred by the breath of the vernal evening breeze.

Tilottama was sixteen; her body had not yet therefore received the full development of grown women; nay, there was still visible a tinge of girlishness in her form and features. The well-arched forehead, not narrow, yet not too expansive either, was like a moonlit stream, expressive of perfect quiescence. The raven-

black ringlets fell on her eyebrows, cheeks, neck, shoulders and breast; while the dark hairs behind were gathered up by an elegant pearl chain. The superb arch of her eyebrows looked like the work of the painter; a shade thicker, and they would have been absolutely faultless. Reader, do you love playful eyes? If so, Tilottama must despair of victory over you; her eyes were gentle; they could not dart glances like the lightning flash. The two dear eyes were very expansive; exquisitely graceful and mild-gleaming. In colour, they resembled delicious blue which appears on the face of the heavens at the "sweet hour of prime." When the damsel gazed with those large clear eyes, not a shadow of guile lurked in them. She had not learnt to look obliquely—her look was all openness and sincerity—an infallible index to the sincerity of her soul. But when any one happened to look at her in the face, she cast her eyes down. Tilottama's acquiline nose never knew the pain of bearing the burthen of the nasal ring. * The two sweet lips were rosy and swam in genial humors; they were small, a little curved, and their habitual expression was a gentle smile. Ah! if your eyes were but once blessed with a sight of a smile on those lips, then be you an ascetic or a sage, young or old, you could never forget it in this life—yet there was nothing in it except sincerity and girlishness.

Although well-made, Tilottama's limbs had not yet attained their full proportions; yet whether owing to her youth or to its natural make, not a tinge of corpulency was perceptible in her beautiful person. Yet all the members of her slender frame were well round-

* Hindu women wear a ring of golden wire, to which a pearl is strung. It is passed through the left nostril, and comes down to the nether lip of the fair ones.

ed and delicate—on the well-rounded wrist, the *Marwari* bracelet; on the well-rounded arm, the diamond-studded *tar*;* on the well-rounded finger, the ring; on the well-rounded loins, the zone; over the well-rounded shoulders the golden chain; on the well-rounded neck the jewelled necklace;—the make of all the parts was exquisitely beautiful.

What is Tilottama about, sitting alone at the window of her chamber? Is she surveying the splendour of the evening sky? Why then are her eyes fixed on the ground? Is she enjoying the fragrant breeze blowing from the banks of the river? Why then minute drops of perspiration stand on her forehead? The breeze can only touch one side of her face. Is she then watching at the cattle grazing in the fields? Not even that; for the 'lowing herd' are by this time 'winding' to their fold. Is she listening to the *kokila's* song? If so, why does she look so pensive? No. Tilottama is seeing nothing, hearing nothing;—she is chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy.

At this girlish age, what contemplation can possibly have absorbed all her faculties? Has her bosom been warmed by the witching influence of the first breath of love? Perhaps.

A maid-servant brought in a lamp. Leaving off thinking, Tilottama took up a book and sat down by the light. She knew to read, she had learnt *Sanskrit* from Abhiram Swami. What is she reading? *Kadamvari.* The book did not please her, and she put it down after reading a little. She then took up *Vasavadatta* by Subandhu. She read a while and then was plunged in abstraction; she read again, and was again lost in thought;—

* A circular jewelled ornament, resembling the bracelet, worn tight just above the joint of the arm.

Vasavadatta too failed to please. She next tried *Gitagovinda.* The book pleased for a time, but on coming to the following verse,

"मुखरमधीरं त्यज मञ्जीरं रिपुमिव केलिषु लोलं।"

[Thy sounding bangles, wench, resign,
Lest they the tell-tales play.
Thy foes they are, sweet lady mine;
For dal'ance restless they.]

she blushed from shame and threw it down. Then for a while, she sat still on the bed. At hand were a pen and inkstand. She now began absently to write this and that, "क," "ख," "ग," room, door, tree, man &c. By degrees, one entire side of the couch became filled with marks. When there was no further room left, she was awakened to a sense of what she was about. She smiled at her work, and began to read what she had written. What has she written? "वासवदत्ता," "महाश्वेता," "क," "ई," "इ," "प," a tree, a *Senjuti** *Siva*, "गीतगोविन्द," "विमला," shrubs, leaves, scrawls, a fort. Confusion! What more has she written!

"कुमार जगत सिंह"

(Prince Jagat Singha.)

Tilottama's face crimsoned with shame. Foolish girl! Who's there in the room that thou shouldst blush so. "कुमार जगत सिंह." Tilottama read the words once—twice—thrice, many times; she looked at the door and read, and looked and read;—like a thief in the very act of stealing.

She had not courage enough to read it for a long while, lest any one should come in and catch her in the act. Hurriedly she

* *Senjuti* is a certain religious ceremony in which Hindu maids worship *Siva*—whose likeness is painted in water stained in ground rice.

fetched water, and washed off the writing; but could not depend upon the result. She then wiped the spot clean with her cloth; and then examined whether any writing was legible any longer. Not a mark was there, yet it seemed to her as if the writing was still to be seen; she again washed the place and once more wiped it;—still, still it seemed as if there was writ,

"কুমার জগৎ সিংহ."

CHAPTER VIII.

BIMALA'S CONSULTATION.

Bimala was standing in the cottage of Abhiram Swami, who was seated on the ground, upon his devotional seat. She was narrating in detail how they had met with Jagat Singha. "To-day," said she, when she had done, "is the fourteenth day; tomorrow the fortnight will complete."

"Well, what have you determined on?" asked Abhiram Swami.

"It is to get sage advice" replied Bimala "that I have sought you, Sir."

"Good," said the Swami. "My advice is—think no more about the matter."

Bimala remained silent, exceedingly dejected.

"Why do you look so sad? Eh?" asked Abhiram Swami.

"What, then, is to be done for Tilottama?" returned she.

"Why?" asked Abhiram Swami curiously. "Have the germs of love sprung up in Tilottama's mind?"

"How much shall I disclose to you, Sire!" said she after a pause. "I have been watching her motions daily and nightly these good fourteen days, and am perfectly satisfied that Tilottama has conceived a very deep feeling."

"You, women," replied the ascetic with a smile, "as soon as you perceive signs of affection, outright conclude it to be deep. Bimala, don't be uneasy on the score of Tilottama's future happiness. It is because she's a girl that her mental balance has been disturbed at first sight. She'll no doubt soon forget Jagat Singha, should all talk on the subject be studiously refrained from."

"Not so, Sire," said Bimala. "The signs seen in Tilottama are not what you take them for. Within this fortnight, a change has come over her nature. She no longer finds delight in talking with her youthful companions or with me; nay, she seldom or never talks now-a-days. Her books are rotting under the couch; her flowers are withering for lack of water; her birds are pining for neglect;—she dosn't eat;—she dosn't sleep; she dosn't make her toilet; she, who was never given to thinking, is now wholly absorbed in thought every hour in the four and twenty. There's a palor in Tilottama's face."

Abhiram Swami remained silent for a long while.

"I was under the impression," he said, "that deep affection can not spring up at first sight; but woman's nature, specially that of girls, is known to God only. But what are you to do? Virendra will never lend his consent to such a match."

"For that very fear," said Bimala, "I havn't up to this

time disclosed this matter; nor did I in the temple tell our name and lineage to Jagat Singha. But now that the noble Singha," here Bimala's face underwent a slight change, "now that the noble Singha has resolved to make friends with Man Singha, what's the harm in his accepting Jagat Singha for his son-in-law?"

Abhiram. "Why will Man Singha consent to such a marriage?"

Bimala. "If he dosn't, the Prince is free to act."

Abhiram. "And why, again, will Jagat Singha marry the daughter of Virendra Singha?"

Bimala. "What side, I pray, is entirely free from caste blemishes? The ancestors of Jayadhar Singha belonged also to the Yadu dynasty."

"Should a daughter of such a family marry the son of the Musalman's brother-in-law?"

Bimala fixed her look on the ascetic. "And why not so?" said she. "What family is too low for the Yadu dynasty?"

At these words, the eyes of the ascetic darted fire. "Wretch!" exclaimed he in a stern voice. "Wretch! thou hast not forgotten thy own wretched fate? Out of my sight!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE LUMINARY OF THE RACE.

The movements of Jagat Singha after he had bidden farewell to his father, spread terror and dismay among the Pathan army.

The Prince had promised to drive away the fifty thousand troops of Katlu Khan to the other side of the Subarnarekha, with the aid of only five thousand men. Although he was as yet indeed far from achieving such success, yet the news of the way in which he displayed his qualifications as a general within two weeks of his departure from Jahanâbad, made Man Singha say, "perhaps the pristine glory of the Rajput name will revive at the hands of my princely son."

Jagat Singha knew perfectly well that to beat in open fight an army of fifty thousand men with a force of five thousand was out of the question—such a course could only end in certain defeat or death. Accordingly, far from trying to bring on an open engagement, he adopted a mode of warfare calculated to avert such a consummation. He always kept his small force strictly hidden in deep forests or in the hollows of the undulating grounds that exist in that country;—he selected such spots to pitch his tents on as lying behind elevations, could not be discovered even by one standing very near. Remaining in this manner, whenever he received intelligence of the presence of any small detachment of Pathans, he burst on it like a wave of the sea and made root and branch work of them. He employed many spies, who went about in various directions in the guises of fruiterers, fishmongers, beggars, religious mendicants, Brahmins, physicians, and they brought him news of the movements and intentions of the enemy. On receiving any intelligence, he rapidly yet cautiously, posted troops at such a place as would afford the greatest convenience for attacking the approaching soldiers without being foreseen. If the detachment happened to be too large, he made no attempt to attack it; because he

knew that in his present position, a single defeat meant utter annihilation—that should he be defeated in a single encounter, all would be lost. In such a case, when he saw that the Pathans had gone out of sight, he kept cautiously following them, and then plundered them of their provisions, horses, cannon, &c. If, on the contrary, the party turned out to be small, he remained quiet in his ambush so long as they did not come up to the desired spot,—then when the opportunity came, with loud cries, he fell on the foe, like a famishing tiger, and cut him to pieces. Under such circumstances, the men could not know the neighbourhood of the enemy, and as a matter of course were quite unprepared for fight. Accidentally falling into the jaws of the enemy, they lost their lives almost without a struggle.

In this manner, a great many soldiers were destroyed. The Pathans were profoundly agitated; and set about to bring on an open fight with the view of crushing Jagat Singha's men. But where they were nobody could tell;—like the messengers of Death, they presented themselves once only before the Pathan soldiers at their last moments, and vanished as soon as they had accomplished their mortal work. Jagat Singha was a master of strategy; he did not always keep his five thousand together;—here a thousand, there five hundred; at one place, two hundred, at another place, two hundred. As he received intimations of the presence of the enemy, he despatched his men by detachments, each proportioned to the exegencies of the case. When a job was accomplished, he no longer kept his men at the scene of action. Where the Rajputs were and where they were not, the Pathans could not at all ascertain. Every day tidings of the destruction of troops came to the ear of Katlu Khan—

every hour brought with it fresh news of disaster. Whatever the business, it became difficult for the Pathan soldiers to come out of the fort, in small numbers ; their excesses at once ceased ; the soldiers took refuge within the fort ; and it became extremely difficult to procure provisions. On receiving news of the redress, the country, previously so much harassed, had met with at the hands of Jagat Singha, Man Singha wrote his son the following letter :—

"Luminary of the Race! I am convinced that the Imperial domains will be rid of the Pathans by you. To back your efforts, I send you ten thousand soldiers more."

The Prince wrote in reply :—

"As you like it, Sire. If more troops come, so much the better ; else, by your blessings, with the five thousand I shall redeem my Kshetriya-like word."

Drunk with martial enthusiasm, the Prince went on achieving uninterrupted success.

Saileshwara! Had all recollection of the lovely damsel, the magic of whose sincere glance had vanquished this warrior in thy temple, vanished quite from his mind amidst the tumult and din of fight? If so, then Jagat Singha is verily composed of stone like thee.

Come, go we to Bimala ; let's see whether Jagat Singha *is* a stone or a man ; let alone the tumult of [the fray ;—Bimala alone is sweet in all this.

CHAPTER X.

PREPARATION AFTER CONSULTATION.

In the evening of the day following that on which Abhiram Swami drove out Bimala, she was making her toilet in her chamber. A woman of five and thirty, and engaged in that sort of thing? And why not so? Does youth pass away with any particular age? Never. Youth only passes away with beauty and love: she that has no beauty, is old in the very flower of youth; she who has it, is blessed with a perpetual youth; she whose mind is unknown to love and joy, is never young; she who has experienced them, never old. To that day, Bimala's body seemed filled with genial humors, and her mind overflowed with love and the ideas and desires which love inspires. Moreover, advance of age serves but to mellow beauty—a remark the truth of which the reader will be all the readier to allow, if he happen to be a little advanced in age.

What man that saw the beauty of her cherry-ripe lips, crimsoned with the color of the betel,* could say that he did not look upon a youthful lady? Who, after seeing the quick side-glances of her expansive eyes, shaded with *kajjala*, † could say that the woman was not younger than a damsel of twenty-five? What a lovely pair of eyes! So gracefully drawn out, so lustrous, so quick-glancing! The eyes of some women unmistakably show that they are ambitious, and that they are ever eager to

* The pungent and aromatic leaf of the Piper Betel, enclosing the areca-nut, catechu, caustic lime and spices, is universally chewed by the natives of the East.

† A kind of collyrium, composed of oil and lamp-black.

tread 'the primrose path of dalliance.' Bimala's eyes were of this kind. I tell the reader that Bimala was youthful;—nay, she may more justly be considered as enjoying a perpetual youth. Who that witnessed the melting softness of her skin, over which shone her *champaka*-like* complexion, could honestly say that a girl of 'sweet sixteen' was mistress of a softer person than she? Who that saw the small, beautiful ringlet which, escaping from behind her ear, had fallen on her cheek in happy negligence, could affirm that a young female's hair had not fallen on a young female's cheek! Courteous reader, kindly do comply with our request; open your mind's eye, and lo! look where seated before her glass, Bimala is dressing her hair—look how taking before her yon thick lock in her left hand, she is applying the comb to it—look at the supressed smile with which she is contemplating her youthful charms in the glass. Ah! Listen to the faint, mellifluous strains which are flowing from her lips at intervals. Nay, should you feel inclined, you are at liberty to feast your eyes with a sight of the voluptuous grandeur of her well-formed bust; then candidly say whether they are Time-conquering or not. Having seen and heard all this, now say what youthful woman is more captivating to your fancy?

Having woven her hair, Bimala did not tie up the braid into a knot, but let it hang at length behind her back. She then wiped her face with a handkerchief soaked in fragrant waters; again stained her lips with a betel containing fragrant spices; and then donned a pearl-studded *kanchali*. † All the parts of her

* *Michelia champaka.*

† A garment worn tight by Hindustani and Musalman women over their breast.

body she decked with golden and jewelled ornaments; but on second thought, she put off some of them. She next wore the curiously embroidered clothes and the coral-studded slippers; and about her well-arranged hair wound the precious pearl chain given to her by the Prince.

When the dressing was over, Bimala went to Tilottama's chamber. On seeing her dress, Tilottama was surprised.

"What's the matter, Bimala?" she asked with a laugh. "Why in this dress?"

"That's no concern of yours," Bimala said.

Tilottama. "In sober truth, say;—where are you going?"

Bimala. "And who, my dear, has told you that I'm going out at all?"

Tilottama was abashed. Perceiving her confusion, Bimala said, kindly smiling,

"I'm going far."

Tilottama's countenance expanded with joy, like a full-blown lotus.

"Pray, where are you going?" she asked Bimala in a soft tone.

"Better guess."

Tilottama fixed her eyes on her face.

"Listen, then," said Bimala, and taking hold of Tilottama's hand, she drew her to the window.

"I'm going to the temple of Saileshwara; there to meet with a certain Prince."

Tilottama's frame was convulsed with some powerful emotion; she made no reply.

Bimala went on,

"I had a talk with Abhiram Swami. In the opinion of the holy father, your marriage with Jagat Singha can never take place; your father will spurn such a proposal. Should this matter reach his ears, I will thank my stars, if I can escape disgrace and punishment."

"Why go then?" With a down-cast face, Tilottama faintly uttered these words;

"Why go then?"

Bimala. "Why? Have I not promised the Prince that I will see him to-night, and acquaint him with our name and lineage? What he will do with the mere knowledge of us, I can't tell. But let me now make ourselves known to him, leaving him to do what he thinks best under the circumstances. If the Prince really loves you—"

Before she could finish, Tilottama gagged her mouth with her cloth.

"I am ashamed to hear your words," said she. "You may go wherever you like; but you shall not speak of me to any ene or to me of any one."

Bimala again laughed. "Who then told you to plunge into this ocean in this girlish age?" said she.

"Off!" exclaimed Tilottama. "I won't hear you any more."

Bimala. "Then I shan't go to the temple?"

Tilottama. "Am I forbidding you to go any where? You may go wherever you will."

"Then I must not go," said Bimala laughing.

"Go," said Tilottama, looking down.

Bimala again laughed. After a while she said, "I go. Don't you sleep till my return."

A smile was also visible on Tilottama's lips;—it seemed to say, "How can I?" Bimala understood this. When about to depart, placing one hand on Tilottama's shoulder, with the other, she took hold of her chin, and for sometime studied her face, sanctified by the presence of sincere love. She then kissed it with affection. When she was going away, Tilottama espied a tear standing on her eyes.

Now Ashmani came to the door of the chamber and said to Bimala,

"Master calls you."

Tilottama, hearing this, came forward, and said in Bimala's ear,

"Change your dress before you go."

"Never fear," replied Bimala.

Bimala then went to Virendra Singha's bed-chamber. Virendra was reposing; one maid-servant was shampooing his legs; another was fanning him. Approaching the couch, Bimala said, "What's your will, Sir?"

Virendra Singha raised his head, and asked in surprise,

"Bimala, are you going out on some errand?"

"Yes, Sir," replied she, "but pray, what's your will?"

Virendra. "How's Tilottama doing? She was in a bad state of health. Has she come all right now?"

Bimala. "Yes, Sir, she has."

Virendra. "Do you fan me for a small while; let Ashmani bring Tilottama here." The woman who was fanning, went out.

Bimala directed Ashmani by a sign to wait outside. Virendra said to the other maid-servant,

"Lachmani, go, prepare some betels and bring them here."

The woman who was shampooing went away.

Virendra. "Bimala, why are you with this dress on, to-day ?"

Bimala. "I have some business."

Virendra. "What is it. I must know it"

Bimala. "Hear then, Sir."

Saying this, she began to gaze at Virendra with eyes which resembled the field of Cupid.

"Hear then, Sir," said she. "I am an adultress; now I go to the appointment."

And anon she darted off.

CHAPTER XI.

ASHMANI'S EMBASSY.

All this while, Ashmani had been expecting Bimala outside, according to her sign. On coming out, Bimala said to her,

"Ashman, I have some very private word with you."

"From your dress," replied the maid-servant, "I gathered that something most important was going to take place to-day."

"To-day I go very far on some important errand," said Bimala. "I can't however go alone at night, nor can I safely

take any other person. So, you shall have to accompany me."

"Where are you going?"—enquired Ashmani.

"Ashmani," said Bimala, "you were not in the habit of enquiring so much in days of old."

Ashmani was a little abashed.

"Then wait a bit," replied she. "I'll go and do some household duties, and then come back."

"One word more," said Bimala. "Suppose that to-day you meet with some one of old days, will he be able to recognise you?"

"How's that?" asked Ashmani in surprise.

"Suppose" continued Bimala, "that you meet with Prince Jagat Singha, eh?"

Ashmani remained silent for a long while, and then said in an agitated voice,

"Shall I live to see such a day!"

"You may," said Bimala.

"The Prince will certainly recognise me."

"Then you shall not go"—said Bimala. "But then, whom shall I take? I can't go alone."

"How do I long to see the Prince!" Said Ashmani.

"Suppress your desire as best you can"—returned Bimala. "But what am I to do now?"

Bimala began to think. All of a sudden, Ashmani began to laugh in her sleeve.

"Ill betide thee!" said Bimala. "Why are you laughing without rhyme or reason?"

"A thought has struck me," answered Ashmani. "What if my darling Diggaja goes with you?"

"Ah! well said," replied Bimala joyfully. "I'll take that gallant with me."

"Gracious me! but I was jesting," said Ashmani in surprise.

"No joke," replied Bimala. "I don't mistrust the numskull. Night and day are all one to the blind man. The Brahmin will understand nothing, and I have no misgivings about him. But then, he won't consent to go."

"Leave that to me," said Ashmani laughing. "I'll bring him. Please wait a little at the gate."

Thereupon, she directed her steps towards a cottage within the castle.

Gajapati Vidyadiggaja, the disciple of Abhiram Swami, has already been introduced to the gentle reader. He has also been enlightened as to why Bimala called him by the cognomen of *Rasik Das Swami* (illustrious bond-slave of gallantry). This personage was the occupant of the cottage. He was about nine feet in altitude—in breadth, scarcely so much as one foot. His legs, from the loins to the toe, measured about six feet. In breadth they resembled two slender sticks. His color 'held divided empire' with ink; perhaps *Agni** had sat down to devour his legs, taking them for very sticks, but had found them so utterly devoid of sap, that he had left them in the shape of brands. Owing to his great height, the worthy tended to be double. Among all his members, the nose held the most prominent place—the general lack of flesh was more than made up there. His goodly crown was shaven like that of an *Uriya* palankeen bearer. The new-grown hairs were very short, and pierced like so many needles.

* The God of fire.

'The pomp and circumstance' of the *tilaka** on his forehead was something splendid.

He had not received the title of *Gajapati Vidyadiggaja* for nothing. His intellect was unusually acute. In his childhood, he had commenced upon Sanskrit grammar in a *chatuspati*.† In not more than seven months and a half, he got by rote the rule "অইউণ্,‡" both text and exposition. What, through the kindness of the Bhattacharjya, and what, through the noise and bustle of the class, he read on for ten and five years, and finished the noun affair. Then before entering upon the other affair, "Let me see what the affair is," said the teacher to himself. He then asked his pupil, "Say, child, what do you get, if the termination, অম্ comes after the base, রাম ?" After much exercise of thought, the pupil said, "রামাম্."§ "Child," said the teacher, "now you may go back to your home. Your education with me has been finished. There's no more learning in my stock to bestow on you."

"I have only one word to say," replied the pupil haughtily. "My title ?"

* Each religious sect of the Hindus paint their forehead and sometimes their arms and chest with certain marks made with colored earths or unguents, distinctive of the class. The *tilaka* resembles an isosceles triangle with its surface filled in. The Krishnavites paint it on their forehead.

† Sanskrit educational institutions, where not only instruction is given *gratis*, but where the pupils are fed at the expense of the teacher. The latter maintains himself solely by voluntary donations given by rich folks, on occasions of religious ceremonies.

‡ This is the first text about the combination of words, in *Mugdhabodha Vyakarana*, a standard Sanskrit grammar.

§ The correct form is রামং.

"My child," said the teacher, "you have acquired such uncommon learning, that some novel title must be conferred upon you. Accept then the title of *Vidyadiggaja*."

Diggaja humbly bowed at his feet in perfect self-complacency, and went home.

"I have now mastered grammar," thought he. "Now I must study Law a little. I have heard that Abhiram Swami is a great scholar. Who is there under the sun save him to teach me? To him then I will go."

With this determination, he became an inmate of the castle. Abhiram Swami taught a good many pupils, and was not the man to set his face against any one;—so that whether Diggaja learned any thing or not, he did not deny him his teaching.

The holy Gajapati was not only a grammarian and a lawyer, but he had a touch also of the rhetorician and the wit; for instance, 'the pail of clarified butter.' His shafts were mainly directed against Ashmani; and there was a profound reason for this. "The advent of such a one as I," thought he "is solely for dalliance. This is my fair Vrindaban; Ashmani is my Radhika."* Ashmani was also a votary of Mirth; and her Madan-Mohan† served but as a substitute for a baboon. Bimala, also upon the scent, occasionally came to make the baboon dance? "Lo! this

* Krishna, one of the ten Incarnations of Vishnu—the Preserver of the universe, is, practically, the Cupid of the Hindus. His flirtations with the milk-maids of Vrindaban have been immortalised by the Sanskrit Muse; and the story of them is literally a 'house-hold word' in men's mouths. His principal lady-love was Radhika, the daughter of Vrikabhanu. From a spiritual point of view, Krishna may be considered as the Spirit of love, and Radhika, the impersonation of all loveliness and grace.

† One of the thousand and one designations of Krishna;—literally, it means, he whose beauty fascinates *Madan*, the Hindu Cupid.

is my Chandravali",* said Diggaja to himself. "And why shouldn't this be, considering what a d-d 'pail of clarified butter' I have discharged? 'Tis a mercy Bimala dosn't know it's a borrowed feather."

To-day great joy awaits Madhava's† luck—to-day Vrikabhanu's daughter is hieing herself to the grove-embosomed cottage.

CHAPTER XII.

ASHMANI'S RENDEZVOUS.‡

Of what pattern of beauty was Diggaja's charmer, Ashmani, the reader is no doubt curious to know; and I will satisfy his curiosity. But it would be highly impudent for so contemptible a person as I am to depart from the beaten path followed by authors when engaged in describing female loveliness. I will therefore begin with the beginning *i. e.* the invocation.

O word-presiding Goddess! § O thou of the lotus seat! O thou with a countenance fine as the autumnal moon! Thou whose feet excel a group of chaste lotuses, and whose bosom overflows with the 'milk of kindness' for thy devotee, vouchsafe unto me the protection of those lily-like feet of thine, for I am going to describe

* One of the sixteen thousand paramours of Krishna and a principal rival of Radhika.

† Another name of Krishna.

‡ In this Chapter, the illustrious author holds up to eternal ridicule those Sanskrit and Bengali writers—and their name is legion—who, departing from truth and sobriety, deal in astounding hyperboles and far-fetched conceits.

§ This is a typical invocation of *Saraswati*, the goddess of learning.

the beauty of Ashmani. O thou who humblest the pride of beauteous damsels! O thou creator of cart-loads of confounded, big, elegant, compound words, do but once grant me shelter in a corner of thy feet; for I am about to describe a beauty. O thou giver of the milk and honey coveted by scholars, thou who scarcely favorest the illiterate! O thou saviour of the base! O thou mother of that perilous phenomenon—*cacoethes scribendi*! O thou who replenishest the lamp of learning at Bartala,* do thou once vouchsafe to ullumine

"———What in me is dark."

Mother, I know that thou hast two several forms. Do not, I beseech thee, make my poor shoulders ache by riding them in that form in which thou didst bless Kalidasa—that form which breathed inspiration into the author of *Raghuvansa* and *Kumarsamvaba*, *Meghaduta* and *Sakuntala*—under whose inspiration Valmiki composed his *Ramayana*—Bhabahhuti his *Malatimadhava* and Bharabi his *Kiratarjuniam*. But descend thou on my head in that form which inspired *Sri Harsha* in producing his *Naisadha*—which has enabled Bharata Chandra to fascinate all Bengal by his incomparable *Vidya*,†—which smiled on the birth of Dasarathi Ray,‡ and which still illumines the depositories of Bartala; for I am going to describe the beauty of Ashmani.

Ashmani's flowing braid was like the snake. Owing to this, the pride of that animal was wounded. "What is the use of

* The *Grub Street* of Calcutta.

† Bharat Chandra, a Bengali author, has written a work entitled *Vidya Sundara* or the loves of *Vidya* and *Sundara*.

‡ A Bengali song-writer of inconsiderable merit.

again showing my cursed face to the world," it said "when I am vanquished by the braid of Ashmani? I will hide my shame under the ground." Saying this, it entered its hole. *Bramha** perceived the danger, for now that the snake had disappeared, who was to bite people any more. Reflecting thus, he pulled it out by the tail. Seeing itself thus compelled to show its face again, it began to beat its head against the ground for grief, and the consequence was that its head got flattened. Ever since snakes have their present hood.† The very Moon‡ 'hid his diminished head' before Ashmani's face. Unable to rise for shame, that divinity went to *Bramha* for redress,—who said, "Never fear. Go, rise. Henceforth let woman's face be hid." Thus came the veil into being. The two dear eyes were like the *Khanjana*§ bird—lest the bird should spread out its wings and fly away, the Creator wisely provided against that too possible contingency by creating the two lids, like the door of a cage. Her nose vied with that of *Garura*¶ himself—that monarch of birds. Seeing it, the feathered monarch took fright and straightway flew to a tree. From that time, birds have lived in trees only. From another cause, the pomegranate left Bengal and fled to Patna; it was followed by the elephant, who fled to Burma with its proboscis. There only remained the Dhawalagiri. "What may be my height?" it thought. "Five miles at most, but these are at least six miles high." Intensely brooding over this subject, its head grew heated; it

* The Creator.

† In allusion to the *Cobra di Capello.*

‡ In Hindu mythology, the moon is a male person.

§ A species of wagtail—*Montacilla Alba.*

¶ The king of birds in Hindu classical mythology.

thereupon fell to heaping ice on it. Ever since it has held ice on its head. *Etcetera, etcetera.*

Through the malice of Fortune, Ashmani was a widow.

On coming to Diggaja's cottage, she found the door shut; a lamp was burning within.

"What ho! holy man," called she.

No one answered.

"What ho! Gosain,* ho!"

Still no answer.

"Hang him! What is the hypocritical fellow about? Lord† Rasik Das,‡ ho!'

No reply still.

Ashmani peeped through a chink in the door, and saw that the Brahmin was engaged in taking his meal; and it was for this reason that he did not speak; for Brahmins do not eat if they happen to speak while eating their meal.

"*He* pretend to sanctity!" said Ashmani to herself. "I shall see whether he eats after speaking."

"I say, slave of a gallant!"

No reply.

"Ho! prince of gallants!"

Answer. "Hum!"

* A Gosain is a spiritual guide of the Vaishnavas—the followers of Chaitanya, a Bengali religious reformer contemporary with Luther.

† The Brahmins are looked upon as gods by the inferior castes. The epithet প্রভু—lord (in the religious sense) is often applied to them.

‡ The word *Rasik* means a person witty with women on the subject of love. Here and elsewhere the author has combined this word with others, to express ludicrousness. These combinations defy translation.

"The Brahmin has answered with rice in his mouth. That's no speaking", thought Ashmani.

"Holla, mirror of gallantry !"

Answer. "Hum !"

Ashmani. "Speak first, man, and then eat."

Answer. "Hu-u-um !"

Ashmani. "Is it come to this ? You a Brahmin, and do this sort of thing ! I will straight tell it to the holy Swami. Whom have you got in the room ?"

The Brahmin eyed round with apprehension, but seeing nothing, began to eat again.

"What's this ?" said Ashmani. "Why do you eat again ? Do you eat after speaking ?"

Diggaja. "Why ? When have I spoken ?"

Ashmani burst out into a laugh.

"Now you have !"

Diggaja. "Right, right, right. No, then I shan't eat again."

Ashmani. "Certainly not. Why, get up then and open the door."

Ashmani saw through the opening that the Brahmin was actually about to rise from his meal.

"No, no," said she. "You must finish the quantity of rice still left."

Diggaja. "No, that can't be. I have spoken."

Ashmani. "How's that ? On my life, you must eat."

Diggaja. "Horrible ! How can I, after speaking ?"

Ashmani. "I am going then—I had many confidential words for you, which you shan't hear. I am going."

Diggaja. "No, no, Ashman! don't you be so angry. I'll eat."

The Brahmin began to eat again;—as soon as he had taken two or three mouthfuls, Ashmani said,

"Well, you have done,—rise and open the door."

Diggaja. "Let me but finish this handful."

Ashmani. "Your stomach will never cry 'hold'. Get up, or else I will divulge that you have eaten after speaking."

Diggaja. "Confound it! Here you are—I am getting up."

The Brahmin sipped the *gandusha,** rose up and opened the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

ASHMANI'S AMOUR.

On the door being opened, as Ashmani entered the room, Diggaja conceived that since his dearly-beloved was come, it behoved him to welcome her in a right gallant fashion. He accordingly waved his hand and exclaimed,

"ওঁ আয়াহি বরদে দেবি!"†

[O blessing goddess hail!]

"This is a very fine piece of poetry" said Ashmani. "Wherefrom have you procured it?"

* Before commencing and after finishing their meal, Brahmins sip a little water from the palm of the right hand, mentally reciting at the same time certain Sanskrit words.

† This passage occurs in the hymn, addressed to *Gayatri*, which itself is a hymn (personified as a goddess) in praise of *Savitri* or the sun.

Diggaja. "To-day I have composed it for you."

Ashmani. "Well have you been called the prince of gallants."

Diggaja. "रसिकः कौषिको वासः".

[The gallant clad in silken vest.]

"My fair one, pray, sit you down; while I wash my hand."

"Ill-starred wretch! you will wash your hand?" said Ashmani to herself. "Beshrew me if I do not make you eat the rejected meal. How's that?" she said aloud. "Why are you going to wash your hand? Eat, man."

"What do you say? Havn't I risen from my meal? Shall I eat again?"*

Ashmani. "And why not? Is there not rice still left? Will you fast?"

"How can I help it?" replied Diggaja with regret. "You were in such a hurry", and he eyed the rice eagerly.

"Then you must eat again," said Ashmani.

Diggaja. "O horrible! I have sipped the *gandusha*, I have risen from my meal, and shall I eat again?"

"Yes, you must. I shall see that." Saying this, Ashmani grasped the Brahmin's arm, by main force dragged him to the dish, and made him sit down.

"O fie! O fie! What have you done! What have you done! Have you not touched me with my mouth still unwashed!"†

* Brahmins are strictly prohibited by their *Shastras* to eat after rising from their meal.

† If a Brahmin with his face unwashed after meal, is touched by a person of an inferior caste, it causes pollution; eating in such a case is out of the question.

Ashmani. "And where's the harm, I pray? What is not allowable in love?"

The Brahmin was silent.

Ashmani. "Eat, I pray you."

Diggaja. "I have sipped the *gandusha*, I have risen from my seat, moreover you have touched me—shall I eat again?"

Ashmani. "You must;—nay, you must eat after I eat of the dish." Saying this, Ashmani took up a handful from the dish, and ate a mouthful.

The Brahmin was struck dumb.

Ashmani returned into the dish the quantity of rice that remained after filling her mouth, and said,

"Come, eat."

The Brahmin was rendered speechless.

Ashmani. "Fall to; listen", here Ashmani said something in Gajapati's ear.

The Brahmin cut a caper high in the air.

"Hey! then I must eat," exclaimed Diggaja and began to gulp down the defiled rice like a very cow. The dish vanished in a twinkling. He then demanded,

"My fair one, now?"

Ashmani. "Confound you! In unwashed mouth?"

"Yes, yes. I'm going to wash my mouth," said he, and thereupon fell to washing his mouth in a blind hurry;—some parts of it were washed, while the others remained untouched by water. One bushel of rice remained deposited in the openings between his teeth.

"Where, my fair one, where is the nectar of your lips?"

Ashmani. "Ill betide you! first wipe your mouth."

Hurriedly the Brahmin wiped his hands and face with the fore-part of his cloth. * * * *

"Now, my fair one ?"

Ashmani. "Come hither."

Diggaja went to Ashmani and sat down by her.

Ashmani. "Draw your mouth near to mine."

Diggaja drew his mouth near to Ashmani's.

Ashmani. "Open your mouth."

Diggaja's obedience was implicit; he parted his lips a foot asunder. Ashmani took out a betel from her handkerchief, and began to chew it, Diggaja continuing with open mouth. When her mouth was entirely filled with saliva mixed with betel, she discharged the whole of its contents into Diggaja's mouth. The man was in sore straits; the beloved one had favored him with the betel juice; he had not therefore the heart to throw it out, for fear of being called ungallant, nor could he bring himself to swallow it, for how could he swallow a whole mouthful of saliva immediately after taking his meal ? So it remained in his mouth, like the poison in the throat of *Nilakantha*.*

Taking this opportunity, Ashmani took a tooth-pick and put it into one of Diggaja's capacious nostrils. On came the sneeze, and the next moment, his weak frame was deluged with the entire quantity of the nectarous fluid, which gushed out violently from his mouth.

* At the far-famed churning of the ocean, there came out, along with the moon, nectar, *Lakshmi*, &c., poison. *Siva* took the poison into his mouth, to save Nature and her works, but could not swallow it; it remained in his throat, which in consequence turned blue. Hence, the epithet, नीलकण्ठ (the blue-throated),

Relieved from the dilemma, the Brahmin began to wash his body, reciting at the same time the following elegant line of verse :—

"दक्षिणे पश्चिमे चापि न कुर्य्याद्दन्तधावनं."

[Facing the south ne'er clean thy teeth :
Facing the west do it neither.]

CHAPTER XIV.

ABDUCTION OF DIGGAJA.

On the other hand, Bimala grew impatient at Ashmani's delay, and thinking it inadvisable to wait any longer, went personally in search of Gajapati. On seeing her enter the cottage, Ashmani exclaimed,

"Welcome! welcome! Chandravali. O welcome!"

"Hey-day!" said Diggaja. "In what a lucky moment did I rise from my bed this morning! One alone is enough, and lo! there have arisen two! The *Shastra* hath it,—

"एकश्चन्द्रस्तमोहन्ति नच मूर्खशतैरपि."*

[A single moon darkness defeats,
And not a thousand fools.]

*"एकश्चन्द्रस्तमोहन्ति नच ताराशतैरपि"
[A single moon darkness defeats,
And not a thousand stars.]
is an aphorism of Chanakya—the minister of Chandragupta—the celebrated king of Magadha. Diggaja ludicrously misquotes it. The aphorisms of this sage have passed into proverbs.

"And have you heard that the prince of gallants has lost his caste?" said Ashmani.

"How so?" said the prince.

"Havn't you eaten the rice defiled by me?" replied Ashmani.

"And what's the earthly harm in that, I pray?" returned he. "It is my holy bread; you are my good mother *Bhagabati*."*

"Out open you!"

Here Bimala whispered into Ashmani's ear, "Won't he go?"

Ashmani. "I havn't yet spoken it to him."

Bimala. "I'll do it then."

"Ho! gallant," said she, addressing Diggaja, "I have a word of very great importance with you."

"What is it, eh?"

Bimala. "Do you love us?"

Diggaja. "What a question!"

Bimala. "Both of us?"

Diggaja. "Both, both."

Bimala. "Will you do as I say?"

Diggaja "Why should you doubt it?"

Bimala. "Instantly?"

Diggaja. "Yes, instantly."

Bimala. "At this moment?"

Diggaja. "At this very moment."

Bimala. "Do you know why we two have come to you?"

Diggaja. "No, I don't."

* This is the name of the spouse of *Mahadeva*, the impersonation of Force.

"We'll elope with you," said Ashmani.

The Brahmin was struck dumb, and for a time remained agape—Bimala suppressed her rising laughter with difficulty.

"Why are you silent ?" asked Bimala.

"Nya-nya-nya-ta-ta-ta-ta,"—no articulation.

"Then you won't go ?"

"Nya-nya-nya, ta-ta, let me first go and speak to the holy Swami."

"What will you speak to him for? Is it an occasion for the celebration of your mother's funeral obsequies, that you will go to the holy man for instructions ?"

Diggaja. "No, then I needn't go; but pray, on what day are you going ?"

Bimala. "On what day! When but at this very moment ? Don't you see me furnished with my ornaments ?"

Diggaja. "At this very moment ?"

Bimala. "And why not so ? If you refuse, tell it,—and we go in search of another. But know we leave our hearts with you."

Gajapati could bear it no longer.

"Very well, I am ready."

"Then take your sheet," said Bimala.

Diggaja put on a *namabali.** Bimala was about to set out, and the Brahmin about to follow, when he said,

"My fair one ?"

Bimala. "What do you say ?"

Diggaja. "When are we returning ?"

* *Vaishnabas* wear a kind of sheet stained with the names of *Hari* (*Vishnu*).

Bimala, "Return! Am I not going away for good? We three will live like man and wives in another country."

Diggaja's mouth filled with a laugh. He said,

"But shall I leave all these articles behind?"

Bimala. "Doubtless you have no end of them!"

Diggaja. "At any rate, the brazen utensils?"

Bimala. "Never fear; I'll buy you all those."

The Brahmin was rather sad; but what could he choose but consent, without running the certain risk of having his love to the women called in question. Making the best of a bad bargain, he said,

"*Khungiputi*?"*

"The fellow sure has cart-loads of them!" thought Bimala. "Make haste," said she.

Vidyadiggaja had two books in all, to wit,—a Sanskrita Grammar, and a treatise on Hindu Law. Taking up the grammar, he said, "What have I to do with this any more? I carry it on my fingers' ends." He then took the other book in his *Khungi*, and uttering 'Durga-Sri-Hari,'† sallied out with Bimala and Ashmani.

"Go on," said Ashmani. "I'll overtake you afterwards."

Saying this, Ashmani entered the house. Bimala and Gajapati went out. They left the castle-gate, unperceived in the darkness. After having advanced a little, Diggaja said,

"How's this? Ashmani is not come?"

* A *Khungi* is a kind of case composed of matted date leaves; it contains the *puti* or MS.

† Just before setting out on a journey, Hindus utter this word, to render it auspicious. The word is compounded of दुर्गा, श्री and हरि. *Durga* is the personification of power, *Sri* is the consort of *Vishnu*, and *Hari* is *Vishnu* himself.

"Perhaps she couldn't come out," answered Bimala. "But are you not content with having me alone?"

The prince of gallants was mute. After a while, he sighed forth, "O the utensils!"

CHAPTER XV.

DIGGAJA'S COURAGE.

With hasty steps Bimala soon left the village of Garmandaran behind her. The night was pitch dark;—she walked cautiously by the help of the star-light. On entering the field, she was rather alarmed; her companion was noiselessly following her, without wasting a single word. At such a moment, the human voice is cheering and welcome. Bimala therefore asked Gajapati,

"Gallant, what are you thinking about?"

"I say, the utensils," said the gallant. Without returning any reply, Bimala laughed in her sleeve.

After a while Bimala again opened her lips.

"Diggaja, do you fear ghosts?" asked she.

"Ram! Ram! Ram!"* exclaimed he. "Take the name of Ram," and drew a yard nearer to Bimala.

"This way is fearfully infested by ghosts," said she, encouraged by her success. Diggaja came up and caught hold of the flowing end of Bimala's sheet.

* The uttering of the name of the great hero of the Solar race is supposed to scare away ghosts.

"The other day," continued Bimala "we were returning after worshipping Saileshwara,—when what should we see but a frightful shape under the banian tree at the road-side?"

From the pull at her dress, Bimala perceived that the Brahmin was shaking like an aspen leaf, and saw that if she went further, he would be deprived quite of his motion. She accordingly desisted, and said,

"Can you sing, gallant?"

"Yes, I can," replied Diggaja. For breathes there a gallant to whom the 'concord of sweet sounds' is a sealed book?

"Pray, then sing a song."

Diggaja began:—

"The hour was ill, I tell thee, sweet,
My Shyam* when I did see,
Perch'd on a bough of *Kadamba*;†
'Twas then all o'er with me."

Hearing the preternatural sound, a cow which was reposing at the road side and chewing the cud, fled for life.

The song however went on,

"My race that day I stain'd, my love,
To follow Shyam alone—
That crested buck holding the reed:
I'm gone, my girl, I'm gone.
"He laughs and talks and laughs and talks;
'Milk-maid, my aunty dear,'
Says he, 'thy pitcher, lass, ha! ha!
In faith, I'll throw down here'."

* Another name of *Krishna*.

Nauclea Kadamba.

Diggaja could sing no longer; all of a sudden his ear was bewitched. Like the symphony breathed by 'harps angelical,'—nectarous, enchanting strains suddenly entered his ear; Bimala herself had begun to sing in the full compass of her voice.

The 'enchanting ravishment' begot of the seven notes flooded the still expanse of the nightly firmament. The sounds mounted the wings of the cool summer breeze and went away.

Diggaja listened with 'bated breath. When Bimala had finished, he said,

"Again."

Bimala. "What again?"

Diggaja. "Pray, sing another dear song."

Bimala. "What shall I sing?"

Diggaja. "Sing a Bengali air."

"I will." Saying this, Bimala began to sing again.

While thus engaged, she felt a strong pull at the border of her dress. She turned round and saw that Gajapati had well nigh come upon her heels, and held fast the flowing end of her sheet, as if his life had depended upon it.

"What is the matter?" asked Bimala in surprise. "Is the ghost out again?"

The Brahmin could not speak, but pointed with his finger.

"There!"

Bimala looked at the direction in silence. Deep and hard breathings entered her ear, and she espied something near the road.

Summoning up courage, she drew nigh and discovered a handsome and well caparisoned horse lying on the ground, gasping for life.

Bimala resumed her journey ; but the sight of the well-furnished steed filled her with apprehensions. For a long while she remained silent. After walking a mile, Gajapati again pulled at her.

"What?" asked Bimala.

Gajapati held up some object to her.

"This is a soldier's turban," said she, and was again plunged in thought.

"The turban," said she to herself, "belonged to the same person that the steed belonged to? No, not so. The turban is a foot-soldier's."

Now the moon arose. Bimala was still more lost in thought. After a long while, Gajapati mustered courage and asked her, "Fair one, why do you speak no more?"

"Do you see any marks on the road?"

Gajapati looked attentively at the way.

"Yes, I see the hoof-marks of many horses."

Bimala. "That's like a sensible man! Do you understand anything from it?"

Diggaja. "No."

Bimala. "Yonder a dead horse, there a soldier's turban, here the hoof-marks of so many horses;—can't you understand anything from all these? But to whom am I speaking!"

Diggaja. "What's the matter, I pray?"

Bimala. "Just now many soldiers have passed this way."

"Let us then walk a little slow" said Gajapati with fear, "to allow them time to get far ahead of us."

"Numskull!" exclaimed Bimala, laughing. "What do you speak of their getting ahead of us? Don't you see the direction

to which the front of the hoof-marks points? These soldiers have gone to Garmandaran," and Bimala was sad.

Presently the white grandeur of the temple of Saileshwara rose to the view. Bimala reflected that there was no necessity of the Brahmin's seeing the Prince;—nay, it was rather calculated to produce evil; and she was thinking how to get rid of him, when Gajapati himself furnished the cue.

The Brahmin again drew near Bimala's back, and caught hold of her apparel.

"What again?" asked she.

"How far is it to that?"

Bimala. "To what?"

Diggaja. "To that banian tree?"

Bimala. "Which banian tree, mean you?"

Diggaja. "Where you espied the other day?"

Bimala. "Espied what?"

Diggaja. "It must be nameless at night."*

Understanding how matters stood, Bimala availed herself of the opportunity, and uttered in a deep voice,

"Oh!"

"What's the matter, I beseech you?" enquired the Brahmin, with consternation.

Bimala with her finger pointed at the banian tree near Saileshwara's temple, and said in a hushed voice,

"Yonder's the banian tree."

Diggaja did not move an inch more; in fact he was utterly incapable of proceeding any farther; and trembled like an aspen leaf,

* The prevailing superstition is, that the mention of ghosts at night brings them to the spot. This also holds in case of serpents.

"Come along," said Bimala.

"I shan't go any farther," replied the Brahmin, trembling.

"I too am affrighted," said she.

The Brahmin now advanced a foot, ready to bolt.

Bimala looked at the tree and descried some white object beneath it. She knew that Saileshwara's bull * used to lie there; but said to Gajapati,

"Take the name of your guardian god, Gajapati. What do you see under the tree?"

"Help! O! help! my God!" exclaimed Diggaja, and off he bolted. Blessed with long legs, in a trice he left a mile behind him.

Bimala knew the nature of Gajapati sufficiently well to infer that he would go straight to the castle gate;—so that without any misgivings on that head, she proceeded in the direction of the temple.

Bimala had considered everything before she came out, except one:

Had the Prince come?

The thought rendered her extremely uneasy. She saw that the Prince had given no certain assurance of his coming; but had only said, "Here you will find me; if you don't, we shall never meet again." In such a case, the probability of his not coming was very great.

If he had not come, then so much trouble had been taken in vain.

"Ah! why didn't I think of this before?" said she to

* *Maheshwara* rides on a bull. *Saileshwara*, as an image of that god, had a bull consecrated to him.

herself. "Why again did I drive away the Brahmin? How shall I return alone this night? Saileshwara, thy will be done!"

To ascend the temple, you had to pass underneath the banian tree. As Bimala was passing that way, she found that the bull was not there, nor was the white object which she had descried. She was rather surprised; for had the bull strayed, it must have been somewhere in the plain.

Bimala looked at the trunk of the tree, when it appeared to her as if she could see only part of the white dress of a man stationed on the other side. This increased her terror; with hurried steps she went towards the temple, ascended the steps by leaps, and vigorously rapped at the door.

It was shut.

"Who's there?"—was the question from within in a deep voice.

"Who's there?"—reverberated the empty vault.

Mustering courage with might and main, Bimala replied,

"A way-worn woman."

The door opened.

A lamp was burning within; in front of her stood a tall man, with the sheathed sword in his hand.

Bimala saw and recognised,

Prince Jagat Singha.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN PRESENCE OF SAILESHWARA.

On entering the temple, Bimala sat down to rest a little. She then bowed down her head to Saileshwara and next bowed to the Prince. For some time, both remained silent, not knowing how to express their minds, each to the other. Both of them were confused. How to introduce the conversation?

Bimala, who was a consummate adept in the peace and war relative to such matters, said with a smile,

"Through the grace of Saileshwara, Prince, I have found you here; I was frightened to come across the plain at night;—now I revive courage in seeing you, Sir."

"All's well with you?" asked the Prince.

The object of Bimala was first to ascertain whether the Prince was really attached to Tilottama—and then to speak of other matters. She accordingly said,

"Yes, Sir, it is for the good of us that I have come to worship Saileshwara. Now I understand that the god is quite satisfied with your worship alone—and will not accept mine. I shall therefore return with your permission."

Prince. "Very well; but you shouldn't go alone; I must convey you home."

Bimala saw that the Prince had not devoted all his time to the exercise of his arms.

"And why shouldn't I go alone, I pray?" asked she.

Prince. "There are dangers in the way."

Bimala. "Then I will go to Maharaja Man Singha."

"Why so?" enquired the Prince.

Bimala. "Why? I have a suit to bring forward to him. The General he has appointed is unable to remove the fears of our way; he is incapable of destroying his enemies."

"The General will reply," said the Prince laughing, "that the destruction of foes even the gods are not equal to;—what is man? Witness, that enemy whom *Mahadeva* had reduced to ashes in the Grove of austerities,—'tis only a fortnight since the same *Manmatha** has created strange disturbance in this his very temple. Such prowess!"

"At whom was the disturbance aimed, I pray?" asked Bimala, with a smile.

"At the General himself," replied the Prince.

"Why," said Bimala "will the Maharaja believe in so impossible a thing?"

Prince. "I have a witness."

Bimala. "And who is such a witness, Sir?"

Prince. "You, good-natured—"

Bimala interposed by saying,

"Your humble servant is very ill-natured; call me Bimala, if you please."

"Bimala is my witness."

Bimala. "No, Bimala will never give such evidence."

Prince. "Indeed, most probable. She that can in no more

* The God of love was reduced to ashes by *Siva*, for his having audaciously disturbed the devotions of the latter. He was, however, again restored to life.

her companion. In course of the conversation, the traveller's glance had also accidentally fallen in that direction and been fast rivetted on her face. He thought it would never again fall to his lot to witness such a 'shower of beauty.' As soon as the young man's glance mingled with that of the damsel, she looked down. On the other side, the attendant receiving no answer to her words, looked right into the traveller's face, and marked well which way he was looking. Knowing also that her fair companion was eying the young man ardently, she whispered into her ear.

"What's this, girl? Dost mean to marry in presence of the *Siva*?"

She who was thus spoken to, gave her attendant a pinch, saying, "Beshrew thee!" Seeing how matters stood, the clever attendant reflected, "I shrewdly fear the charms of this young man have begun to tell on my charge. Should she conceive a passion for him, even if worse consequences do not happen, her peace of mind, alas! would go for ever. Ah! that's to be averted. Aye, but how? Let me try artifice to rid ourselves of him."

Having determined this, with the innate cleverness of a woman, she said, "Sir, women's good name is so frail a thing that it can hardly bear the weight of the air, what shall I say of to-night's violent gale? Therefore, now that the storm is over, we shall with your permission see whether we can walk home."

"If you needs must go home afoot at this hour of night," replied the young man, "I will convoy you. The sky has become clear, and I would by this time have set out for my quarters; but it is only because I have not the heart to leave

a beauty like your companion, without a guard, that I am still here."

"Sir," replied the woman, "your kindness towards us has been very great—indeed so great that it alone prevents me from speaking out my mind fully to you lest you think us ungrateful. But, sir, what shall I tell you of woman's cursed luck? We are naturally looked on with suspicion. It would indeed be a very happy thing if you accompanied us, but pray consider when my master, who is the father of this girl, will ask her, 'Under whose safeguard have you come at this dead hour?' what shall she answer?"*

The young man mused a little and then replied, "Why, even thus, 'Under the safeguard of Jagat Singha, son of Maharaja Kinorh Man Singha?'"

Had the thunder burst there at that moment, the females could not have been struck with greater surprise. Immediately both stood up. The damsel slinked away behind the image; the clever-tongued dame wound the flowing border of her cloth round her neck and with clasped hands said, "Pardon, noble Prince. We have unwittingly been guilty of a thousand transgressions."

"Such grave transgressions are past all pardon," replied the Prince laughing, "but I'll forgive if you let me be acquainted with you; otherwise you cannot escape condign punishment."

Soft words invariably breathe courage into a clever woman. "Name it, sir,—issue your fiat, we agree."

"Nothing but this," replied Jagat Singha, "that I will conduct you home."

* The English reader is requested to remember that a Hindu lady can not, for the life of her, dare be found in the company of a male stranger —so tremendous is the power weilded by society over the weaker sex.

The attendant was in a dilemma. For some very particular reason she was loath to make the damsel known to the officer of the Emperor of Delhi,—that he should accompany them was far more objectionable, being, as it was, of graver import. She hung down her head.

Just at this moment the treading of a good many horses at no great distance from the temple, was heard. Going out hurriedly, the Prince saw about a hundred horsemen passing by. He marked their uniform and recognised them to be his own Rajput soldiers. Some time ago the Prince had gone to Vishnupur on some military duty; and had been returning to his father's camp with a hundred horsemen. In the afternoon he had left his men and gone before; and afterwards following a path different from that taken by his soldiers, he had been overtaken alone by the storm and put to trouble. Now finding them again, in order to ascertain whether they had descried him, he exclaimed, "Victory to the Emperor of Delhi!" Immediately a horseman approached. On seeing him, the Prince said, "Dharam Singha, I stopped here on account of the storm."

"After searching much for you, sir," said Dharam Singha, humbly making obeisance, "at length we have come here tracing the marks of your horse's hoofs. We have also brought up the horse, which we found near yonder banian tree."

"Do you stay here with the steed," said Jagat Singha, "sending two men to fetch up a palankeen and bearers from a neighbouring village. Let the rest of the soldiers march on."

Dharam Singha was rather taken by surprise at this order, but thinking it unnecessary to ask his master for any reason of his command, said, "I will carry out your orders, sir."

He then communicated to the soldiers the intention of the Prince. On coming to know it, some one smiled and enquired of his campanion, "why things were ordered so wondrous strange that day." "And why shouldn't this be, Sir?" answered another. "Remember, the Maharaja at the head of the Rajputs is surrounded by no less than five hundred queens."

Meanwhile availing herself of the Prince's absence, the young lady withdrew the veil and said to her hand-maid, "Bimale, why are you so unwilling to make me known to the Prince?"

"I answer that to your father; but now, what's this noise again?"

"Methinks," replied the maiden, "some of his soldiers have come in search of the Prince. But why should you fear while he himself is with us."

Before the return of the horsemen who had gone to bring up a palankeen, the bearers and guards who had left the ladies and taken shelter in an adjacent village, came back. Espying these, Jagat Singha re-entered the temple and said to the attendant, "Some bearers accompanied by several armed men, are coming this way with a palankeen. Please come out and see whether they are your people." Bimala looked out from the door, and recognised them to be their men. "Then I mustn't stay here any longer," said the Prince, "my presence with you may be attended with evil. Farewell, then. I pray to Saileswara that you may reach home in safety. I only beg that you will not make known our meeting within a week. But O! do not forget me either. Rather keep this with you for remembrance. As for me, your memento is in my heart—even the fact that I could

not learn who your lord's daughter is." He thereupon took out a pearl neck-lace from his turban and placed it on Bimala's head. Bimala, after twining the precious gift around her hair, bowed to the Prince in great humility. "Noble Prince," said she, "I beseech you not to blame me for withholding from you the information in which you have happened to take so much interest. Believe me, Sir, there is sufficient reason for this silence on my part. If however you are exceedingly curious, let me know where I may see you a fortnight hence."

"In this very temple," said Jagat Singha after reflecting a little. "If you don't see me here, we shall never meet again."

"God bless you, Sir!" said Bimala, humbly bowing. After looking once more on the youthful lady with burning ardour, the Prince leaped on his horse and was out of sight.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOGAL AND THE PATHAN.

I shall not, for the present, satisfy the curiosity of the gentle reader by following Jagat Singha from Saileshwara's temple, or by narrating the personal history of the charming damsel discovered in it. Jagat Singha was a Rajput. In order to explain why he had come to Bengal, and been journeying alone over a lonesome, open track, I shall briefly describe the political condition of Bengal at this time. This Chapter will therefore be historical, and an impatient reader may pass over it; but nothing like patience,

After Bakhtiyar Khiliji had planted the standard of the crescent in Bengal, the Pathans held undisputed sway over the country for several centuries. In 932, the celebrated Sultan Babar defeated the reigning Emperor Ibrahim Lodi, and ascended the throne of Delhi. But Bengal did not then pass under the sceptre of the Tamerlane dynasty.

Until the accession of that luminary of the Mogal dynasty—Akbar, Bengal remained under the sway of independent Pathan Sovereigns. In an evil hour, the fool-hardy Daud Khan laid his hands on the person of the sleeping Lion. As the consequence of his rashness, he was defeated by Manaim Khan, one of Akbar's generals, and so lost his throne. In 982, Daud fled to Orissa with his followers, and Bengal passed into the hands of the Mogal Sovereigns. When the Pathans had established themselves in Orissa, it became an arduous task for the Mogals to dislodge them from their hold. In 986, of the Bengali era, Khan Jaha Khan, viceroy of the Emperor, worsted the Pathans a second time, and brought Orissa under his master's yoke. Afterwards, a disturbance broke out. The Jaigirdars and other land-holders took umbrage at the introduction into Bengal of Akbar's new system of settlement for the collection of the imperial dues, and drew the sword in order to maintain their established rights. Taking advantage of this crisis, the Pathans of Orissa again raised their head, and investing one of their member, named Katlu Khan with the insignia of royalty, again brought Orissa under their dominion; and with great demonstrations of power, opportunely took Midnapur and Vishunpur—two districts lying beyond the pale of Orissa.

Both the able viceroy, Khan Azim and afterwards, Shahabaz

Khan failed to wrest the conquered province from the enemy. At length a Hindu warrior was placed in command for the accomplishment of this difficult task.

When bursting with new-born fanaticism and in all the pride of strength, the surges of the Musalman soldiery rushed from the Himalayan chains, Prithviraj and other Rajput heroes resisted the tide with matchless valour. But alas! India's downfall was in the counsel of the Eternal. Instead of combining their strength, the Rajput princes fell to quarreling with one another. By virtue of reiterated efforts, the Musalmans beat the Hindu powers one by one, and established the Empire of Delhi. But although they succeeded thus far, yet they could not at once render lifeless the Kshetriya-begotten Rajputs. Many Rajput Princes remained independent; and from this time down to the final disruption of the Moslem Empire, this warlike race repeatedly challenged the *Javanas** to the field and on many occasions put them to the rout. In course of time, however, many Rajput chiefs were compelled to pay tribute to the Emperor of Delhi; and in the decay of their prowess, to set aside their prestine dignity, in order to obtain the good graces of the Victor by alliances with the Imperial house and by other means. The Emperors, for their part, were anxious to lay under obligation their heroic antagonists, by extending to them their friendship and alliance. In course of time, the tributary Princes began to enter the imperial service. The high-minded Akbar was in every respect far wiser than his predecessors. It was his conviction that for the administration of this country, the children of the soil and not foreigners—are pe-

* This opprobrious epithet is used by the Hindus in designating the Mahomedans. It is somewhat analogous to the 'barbarian' of the Romans.

culiarly fit, and further, that either in war or in civil administration, the Rajputs had no equals. Agreeably to this belief, he, as a rule, appointed the natives—more particularly the Rajputs, to important posts of Government.

At the time of our story, of those Rajputs who had gained eminent appointments, Maharaja Man Singha was one of the foremost. He was the brother-in-law of prince Selim himself, the son of Akbar. After Azim Khan and Shahabaz Khan had been foiled in their endeavours, Akbar sent this personage as Governor of Bengal and Behar.

In 997 Man Singha reached Patna and first suppressed the disturbances. Next year he marched towards Orissa. On arriving at Patna, he had appointed Syed Khan as his deputy in Bengal, himself intending to stay at Patna. Entrusted with this office, Syed Khan was residing at the city of Tanda, the then capital of Bengal. Now marching for Orissa, Man Singha summoned his subordinate, writing him to say that he must join him at Burdwan with his forces.

On reaching Burdwan, the Raja saw that Syed Khan had not come, but had simply sent a message. He reported that great delay was inevitable for him to levy troops;—nay, that the rains would set in by the time that he could set out with his army; so that if the Raja would encamp till the wet season was over, he would join him with his men. Seeing no alternative, the Raja closed with this proposal, and encamped on the banks of the Darukeshwara river, in the village of Jehanabad, waiting for Syed Khan.

While at Jehanabad, the Raja received intelligence that Katlu Khan emboldened by his inactivity, was plundering the country

than a fortnight forget her promise,—she can never prove a true witness!"

Bimala. "Sir, kindly put me in mind of my promise."

"To tell me the name and lineage of your companion."

"Prince" said she, suddenly changing her tone of raillery for one of profound earnestness, "Prince, I hesitate to satisfy your curiosity, lest it should not be for your peace of mind."

The Prince mused for a while; he too renounced the light vein.

"Bimala," said he, "is the discovery of her name and lineage calculated to render me unhappy?"

"Yes, Sir," replied Bimala.

"Come what will," said the Prince, after reflecting sometime, "do you satisfy my longing. Nothing can possibly be more harassing than the intolerable suspense which I am suffering. If what you apprehend turn out to be true, that even would be preferable to my present misery, for then I shall be able to console my mind with something. Bimale! I havn't come to you, prompted by mere curiosity;—no, now I have no time to indulge in curiosity. Within this whole fortnight I have known no other bed than my steed's back. It is because my mind is exceedingly restless that I have sought you."

It was to extort this confession that the previous endeavours of Bimala were made. With the view of extorting something more, she said,

"Prince, you are well versed in political morality. Pray, consider whether you should, in this time of war, suffer your mind to be absorbed in the contemplation of a lady hard to

obtain? For the good of both, I conjure you to try to forget my companion. No doubt, you will succeed in the excitement of fight."

"Ah! whom shall I forget?" replied the Prince, his nether lip showing a smile significant of his mental disquiet, "whom shall I forget? The image of your companion has engraven itself deep on my mind at first sight; this heart can never get rid of it, without being reduced to ashes. People call me stone-hearted; you know what is engraved on stone perishes with the stone itself. What do you speak of fight, Bimale? Ever since I saw your companion, in fight only I have been engaged. Whether in the field or in camp, I have never for a moment been able to forget that countenance. When the Pathan had raised his sword to cut off my head, my first thought was that if I then fell, I should never see her again—that our first sight was destined to be our last. Bimale, where shall I go to see your companion?"

What need of further confession. Bimala said,

"My companion you will find at Garmandaran;—the lovely Tilottama, daughter of Virendra Singha."

Jagat Singha felt as if an adder had stung him. He hung down his head and supported himself on his sword.

"Your words have, after all, proved true," said he, with a sigh, after a long pause. "Tilottama is not destined to be mine. I go to the field—there to drown all hopes of my future happiness in the enemy's blood."

Bimala was touched by the Prince's grief. "If true affection met with its reward in this world, noble Prince, you certainly deserved the hand of Tilottama. And why do you at once give

way to despair, Sir? To-day, Fortune is adverse, tomorrow, she may be friendly."

Sweet is the voice of Hope; in the darkest day, she whispers soft into man's ear, "The cloud and the storm will not endure for ever; why then are you cast down? Listen to my words." Hope spoke through Bimala's mouth, "Why are you cast down? Listen to my words."

Jagat Singha listened to the voice of Hope. Who can know the Divine Will? Who can read beforehand the decrees of Fate? What is impossible under the sun? What impossibilities have not taken place in this world?

Yes, the Prince listened to Hope.

"To-day my mind is exceedingly restless;—I am incapacitated quite to judge the right course. What Fate has decreed must happen afterwards, for who can control Fate? Now I can only express my mind. Here, before the holy presence of Saileshwara, I vow never to accept the hand of any one save Tilottama's. I implore you to speak to your companion all that I have said. Pray, tell her that I long to see her once more only. I swear never to ask for this boon again."

Bimala's countenance beamed with joy.

"How shall you, Sir, get the reply of my companion?"

"I cannot venture to trouble you again and again," answered the Prince, "but if you see me once again in this temple, I shall rest your debtor. Some time or other, you may expect a return from Jagat Singha."

"Prince," replied Bimala, "I am your servant; but I greatly fear to come alone at night by this road. It is only because my pro mise had to be fulfilled, that I have come to-night. Now the

country is infested by the enemy; I shall be exceedingly afraid to come again."

"If you shouldn't think it wrong," said the Prince, after reflecting a little, "I can go along with you to Garmandaran. I'll wait at some fit place, where you will bring me her mind."

"Come then, Sir," replied Bimala delightfully.

They were about to sally out, when they heard the sounds of cautious steps outside the temple.

"Have you brought a companion with you?" demanded the Prince, with a little surprise.

"Oh no," said Bimala.

"Whose steps can we have heard then? I am afraid somebody outside has overheard our conversation."

He thereupon came out and went all round the temple, but found none.

CHAPTER XVII.

VIRA PANCHAMI.*

After bowing down to Saileshwara, Jagat Singha and Bimala set out for Garmandaran, in an alarmed spirit. After proceeding in silence for some time, the Prince said,

"Bimala, I am curious about one thing. I don't know what you will say, when you hear it."

* This word is compounded of वीर (hero) and पञ्चमी (the fifth day of the full or the new moon). There is no such rite mentioned in the *Shastras*.

"What is it, Sir?"

Prince. "I am convinced you can never be a maid-servant."

"And why should you think so, pray," asked Bimala with a smile.

Prince. "There is some very particular reason why the daughter of Virendra Singha cannot be the daughter-in-law of the lord of Abnir. It is a very great secret. You could not possibly know it, if you were no better than a maid-servant."

"You have guessed right, Sir," said Bimala with a sigh. "I am not a maid-servant, although behave like one, as my bad luck would have it; but why do I blame my luck? It has not been so bad either."

The Prince perceived that the topic had awakened grief in the mind of Bimala. He accordingly dropped it.

"Prince," went on Bimala, "one day I will let you know who I am—but not now. But what noise is that? Is some one dogging us?"

The sound of human steps was now distinctly heard; it also appeared as if two men had been whispering to each other. They had then walked a mile.

"I begin to fear greatly," said the Prince. "I'll go and look out."

Saying this, the Prince retraced his steps some way, and also looked aside, but saw no one. He returned and said to Bimala,

"I fear some body is following us. Let's talk cautiously."

They went on, talking in an almost inaudible tone. Now they came up to the castle.

"How will you enter the castle now?" asked the Prince; "the gate must be shut at this late hour."

"Content you, Sir," replied Bimala. "I provided for that when I came out."

"Is there any secret passage?" asked the Prince laughing.

"Where the thief is," returned Bimala laughing, "there's the breach."

"Bimala," said the Prince after a pause, "I needn't go any farther. I'll wait in the mangoe wood by the castle. I beseech you, do you earnestly implore your companion in my name. I long to bless my eyes once more with a sight of her,—be it after a fortnight, a month—or even a year."

"Yonder mangoe grove is not solitary enough. Pray, Sir, come with me."

Prince. "How far?"

Bimala. "Into the castle."

The Prince mused a little, and then said, "No, Bimala, I may not do this. I never will enter the castle without the permission of its lord."

"What do you fear, Sir?" asked Bimala.

"Princes"—replied he haughtily—"Princes never fear to go any where. But, pray, consider whether it becomes the son of Abuir's lord to steal into the castle without the express knowledge of its master."

"It is I," said Bimala "who am taking you in."

"I beseech you," returned the Prince, "don't you think I am slighting you as a maid-servant, if I enquire what right you have to welcome me into the castle."

"You will not go" asked Bimala—"unless you know my right?"

"Never"—was the answer.

Bimala bent to the Prince's ear and said something.

"Proceed, madam, so please you," said the Prince.

"I am a maid-servant, Prince," said Bimala; "and should be commanded."

"What you will," said the Prince.

The way they were then following led to the gate of the castle; on its side was the mangoe-wood, which was invisible from the main entrance. If you wanted to go where the Amodara flowed behind the castle, you must walk through this wood. Bimala now left the highway, and entered the wood, accompanied by the Prince.

After entering it, they heard the sound of the breaking of dry leaves, and of human steps.

"Again!" said Bimala.

"Once more stay a little," said the Prince; "I will look about."

He drew his sword, and went in the direction of the sound; but could see nothing. Underneath the mangoe-wood, such dense thickets were formed by the exuberance of various wild shrubs and plants, and such a gloom was spread by the trees, that the Prince could no where see far before him. He thought it not impossible that the sounds had proceeded from some animals treading upon the dry leaves. Whatever it might be, thinking it expedient to dispel his doubts, he got up to the top of a tree, and began to survey round. After a long while, he espied the moonlit turbans of two men, whose persons were hid in the deep gloom formed by the boughs of some tall mangoe tree.

The Prince marked well and was perfectly satisfied as to the presence of the men. He also carefully marked the tree, so as

to preclude the chance of his missing it on his return. Then softly coming down, he came up to Bimala, and related all that he had seen.

"If I had two spears now!" said he.

"What will you do with spears, pray?" asked Bimala.

Prince. "Then I could ascertain who these men were. The signs bode no good. From the turbans, I think the rascally Pathans have been following us with some evil intent."

Immediately the remembrance of the dying steed at the road-side, the turban, and the traces of horse's hoofs flashed upon Bimala's mind.

"Please stay here then," said she; "I'll bring you the spears presently."

Saying this, she hastened to the base of the castle. A window of the room below that in which she had made her toilet in the evening, faced the mangoe-wood. She got up to the window, and taking out a key from her garment, turned it in a lock which was attached to the door-case. Then grasping a bar, she pushed the window in the direction of the wall. By the power of strange art, the window together with the door-case and the bars entered an opening in the wall, and a passage stood ready open for the entrance of Bimala. After entering the room, she pulled out the door-case, and the window was again placed in its former site. Bimala turned the key in another lock on the inner side, similar to the other one, and the window was fast established in its place, defying all attempts at opening it from the outside.

With hasty steps, Bimala went to the arsenal, where she said to the guard,

"Never tell any one of what I ask from you. Let me have two spears. You shall get them back."

What will you do with spears, mother, I pray ?"

"To-day I celebrate the *Vira-Panchami* rite,—which blesses the woman celebrating it with a heroic son. The ceremony requires the worship of weapons. I am desirous of getting a son. Don't tell it to any one."

The guard understood as he was made to understand. All the servants in the castle paid her implicit obedience ; and the man, without another word, went in and brought out two sharpened spears.

With her former speed, Bimala returned to the window, with the spears, opened the window as before, and hurried forth to Jagat Singha.

Whether through the excitement of hurry, or feeling secure in the thought that she should be by, and return immediately, Bimala did not lock the passage, when going out; and this afforded entrance to danger. An armed man stood behind a mangoe tree very close to the window. He perceived this error ; but did not stir so long as Bimala was not out of sight. When she had disappeared, he left his sounding shoes, and by soft steps neared the entrance ; and casting a glance within to see if any one was there, and seeing none, noiselessly glided in. He then entered the castle by the door of the room.

On the other side, the Prince took the spears from Bimala, and, as before, ascended the tree. He then looked at the other tree which he had marked ; but now saw only one turban ;—the second person had disappeared. Then holding one spear in his left hand, he took the other in the right, and aiming at

the turban, sent the weapon after it, with all the mighty energy of his arm. Anon a powerful rustling of the leaves was heard, and then the heavy fall of some thing. The turban was no more there;—the Prince concluded that his unerring aim had dislodged the person from his boughy station, and brought him low.

Jagat Singha speedily descended and came to the wounded person. He saw that an armed Musalman soldier was lying as if dead; the spear had penetrated beside one of his eyes.

The Prince looked attentively and found that life was quite extinct. The spear had entered beside his eye, and went right through the brain. Taking out a note which was enclosed in his amulet, Jagat Singha came to the moonlight and read it. It ran:—

"The followers of Katlu Khan shall obey the orders of the bearer, on sight of this note.

KATLU KHAN."

Bimala had only heard the noise, but could not understand what it meant. The Prince came to her, and related all.

"Alas!" exclaimed she, "beshrew me if I would ever have fetched you the spears, Prince, had I known this. I am a great sinner, and shall hardly be able to expiate the deadly sin I have been guilty of to-night, for a long time to come."

"What room for regret," replied the Prince, "in destroying our enemies? Such an act is righteous."

"Let warriors think so," returned Bimala; "we are women."

"Prince," said she after a pause, "there's harm in further delay. Pray, come, let's enter the castle. I have left the door open."

Hastily coming to the foot of the castle, Bimala entered in, followed by the Prince. While he was entering, his heart trembled and his feet shook. What could it bode to one a single hair of whose head would not be thrown off its accumstomed position in the face of innumerable odds ;—what did it bode to him while entering into this mansion of joy ?

Bimala shut the door in the same way, and then led the Prince to her bed-room. "I shall be back in a moment," said she. "If you please, for a while sit on this couch. If your mind is not otherwise engaged, pray, Sir, remember that the seat of the Deity was merely a banian leaf."*

She went out, and after a little while, opened the door of an adjoining chamber. "Noble Prince," said she from the room, "will you please step in and hear a word ?"

Again the Prince's heart trembled !—perhaps, it gave no uncertain sound ! He rose up from the couch, and went to Bimala.

Anon she darted out like lightning ; the Prince found himself in a perfumed chamber ;—a silver lamp was burning. In a corner was a veiled woman ;—she was none other than Tilottama.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CLEVER PERSON AND HER FOIL.

Bimala came back to her chamber and sat down on the couch. Her countenance betokened excess of joy at having fulfilled her

* The *Shastra* has it that at the reign of chaos, *Vishnu* reposed on a banian leaf.

desire. A lamp was burning there; before her stood the glass;—her dress looked as fresh as it did in the evening. For a moment, she looked at her image on the glass. The same happy entanglements of her braid, the same dark sheen of the *kajjala* on the underlid of her eyes, the same rosy betel stain on her nether lip, the same pendants ever and anon waving, touching her round cheeks. She was lying in a recumbent posture. Who that saw her manner then, could again pant for the love of a youthful woman? Bimala contemplated her own charms with a smile. Did it proceed from regret at having sent the peerless Jagat Singha to Tilottama, after having brought him with her own exertions? Oh no! Far from being pained at such a consummation, she was delighted by it beyond measure. She smiled at the thought that the erudite Diggaja did not consent to leave his home absolutely without reason!

Bimala was waiting for Jagat Singha, when suddenly the deep blast of a trumpet burst upon her ear from the adjoining mangoe wood. She started in alarm, for the trumpet used to sound only at the gate, and never at so late an hour. Anon the remembrance of all that she had seen and heard on her way to the temple and back flashed upon her mind. She immediately inferred that the sound was the harbinger of evil; and hurried to the window to look out; but could see nothing particular in the wood. Filled with apprehensions, she sallied out of the room. Next to it was the yard, beyond which was another suite of rooms containing a staircase for ascending to the roof. Bimala went to the roof and began to look around; but could see nothing on account of the deep darkness in the wood. With increased apprehension, she then came to the balustrade, and placing her breast upon it and

bending down her face, surveyed the place to the very base of the castle; but with her former success. The shining green foliage was bathed in the soft moonlight; at intervals, as the breeze swayed the leaves, they wore a glistening red. Beneath the wood reigned deep, palpable darkness; here and there the moonlight escaping through openings in the foliage glinted over certain spots. On the still breast of the Amodara was reflected the moon with the star-crested welkin. At a distance, on the other bank rose the heaven-kissing appearances of the stately buildings. Here and there the form of a sentinel was visible on their roofs. This was all that she could see. She was about to return in disappointment, when she felt as if some one had touched her back with a finger. She started and turned round—an armed individual unknown to her was standing before her. She was struck motionless as a statue.

"You mustn't cry," said the armed person. "Do so—and your tender frame I shall hurl down to the bottom of the castle."

The man who thus suddenly stupified Bimala was dressed like a Pathan soldier. From the completeness of his costly dress, it might easily be inferred that the person held some important post. His age did not exceed thirty and he was eminently handsome. A diamond graced the turban on his lofty forehead. Were Bimala not then utterly confounded, she could perceive that the individual before her could almost challenge a comparison with Jagat Singha himself. His body was not so large, nor was he so broad-chested; but he had the same heroic and graceful mein, and boasted of a softer person. In his precious belt was a Damascus dagger in a sheath studded with corals. He held the naked sword in his hand, but had no other weapon.

"Don't cry; if you do so, I will instantly throw you down."

The amazement of Bimala gifted with presence of mind lasted but for a moment. She understood the soldier's meaning when he spoke a second time. Just behind her was the verge of the roof; before her stood an armed soldier; soldiers, she knew, were no idle talkers, nor was the threat so hard of execution either. Revolving all this in her mind, the sensible woman said,

"Who are you?"

"Where's the need of your knowing me?" replied the soldier.

"Why have you come here into the castle?" asked she. "Don't you know that thieves are led to the stake?"

Soldier. "I am no thief, fair one."

Bimala. "How have you entered the castle?"

Soldier. "Through your own kindness—when you left the window open, I came in; and have come up here in your wake."

Bimala struck her forehead with her hand.

"Who are you?" again asked she.

"Why should I now hesitate to make myself known to you?" said he. "I am a Pathan."

Bimala. "This is not enough—you are a Pathan by race; but who are you?"

Soldier. "By God's grace, my name is Osman Khan."

Bimala. "I have never heard of any such person."

Soldier. "Osman Khan, the general of Katlu Khan." Bimala trembled. She burned with the desire of escaping any how and informing Virendra Singha of the tidings. But there was absolutely no way of her doing so, for before her stood the general obstructing her passage. Seeing no alternative, she thought that so long as she could keep him engaged in talk,

so long she was free ; afterwards, some sentinel on the roof might chance to come that way. Deciding this, she again set on to talk.

" Why have you entered the castle, Sir ?"

" We sent a messenger to Virendra Singha," answered Osman Khan, " requesting him to side with us. In return, he has challenged us to enter the castle with our soldiers."

" Because the master of the castle, I understand you to say"—said Bimala, "has refused to ally himself with your people and has sided with the Mogals, therefore you have come to capture it. But I see you are alone."

Osman. " At present I am so."

" Perhaps it is for this very reason," asked Bimala " that you are preventing my going."

This was said with the vain hope of escaping from the hands of the Pathan, who, she thought, would feel piqued at the imputation of cowardice and prove his valour by making way for her.

" Fair one," replied Osman with a smile, " you have nothing to be afraid of, except your side-glance. I have no very great fear even of that. But I have a suit to you."

Bimala felt curious, and fastened her look on Osman Khan's face.

" Pray, kindly oblige me," said Osman, " by giving me the key which is tied up in the corner of your sheet. I should hesitate to insult you by laying my hands on your person."

" That's very fine !" replied Bimala, gently laughing. " Were you not but a moment before ready to crush my body by hurling me down ?"

"Necessity has no law," said the general. "And if need be, I shall have to do it now."

It required no long time for a clever woman like Bimala to understand that the key of the window was indispensably necessary to the soldier. But she did not know how to evade him. He that can take a thing by force, jests when he solicits for it. If the key was not voluntarily given, the general would master it by force. Any other person in her position would undoubtedly have handed the key, but the clever Bimala said,

"If I don't give you the key willingly, how will you take it, Sir?"

Whilst she was speaking, she took her sheet in her hand.

"If you don't," replied Osman, his eyes fast fixed on the sheet, "if you don't, I will enjoy the pleasure of touching your body."

"Do it, Sir," said she and sent the sheet in the direction of the wood. No sooner had she done so, than Osman, whose gaze had been rivetted to the sheet, stretched out his hand and caught hold of the flying cloth. Bimala was amazed at the vigilance of Osman.

Having secured the sheet, Osman Khan took hold of Bimala's arm with a firm grasp. Then holding the sheet between his teeth, he loosened the key and deposited it in his belt. His next action blanched the countenance of Bimala; he bound her hands fast to the balustrade with the sheet.

"What are you at?" enquired Bimala.

"It's an exigency of war," replied Osman.

Bimala. "You will soon reap the consequence of this foul deed!"

Osman was going away, leaving Bimala in that plight when he returned, and saying, "No trusting a woman's tongue," gagged her mouth as well.

Osman then descended to the room below Bimala's. He there turned the key, as Bimala had previously done, and pushed the window into the wall. When a passage was made, Osman began to whistle softly. Immediately a bare-footed soldier came up from behind a tree and entered in. He was followed by another. In this manner, a large number of Pathan soldiers noiselessly crept into the castle. To the last man that came, Osman said,

"No more ; do you all remain outside. When you hear my signal, attack the castle from the outside. Tell it to Taj Khan."

The man returned. Taking the soldiers with him, Osman again noiselessly ascended to the roof. When passing by the place where Bimala was a captive, he said,

"This woman is very clever ; not safe to trust her. Rahim Saikh ! do you mount guard over her. Free her mouth ; but should she attempt to fly or talk with any one or talk aloud, don't scorn to kill a woman."

"I will, Sir," replied Rahim, and remained there.

From roof to roof, the Pathans went to the other side of the castle.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOVER AND HIS LASS.

When Bimala saw that the clever Osman was away, she revived courage, for now she could hope to regain her freedom by

dint of her cleverness. She anon fell to thinking how to effect it.

After the sentinel had remained standing for sometime, Bimala began to converse with him. Sentinel or Pluto's messenger,—who can ever willingly abstain from conversing with a fair woman? At first Bimala talked on various indifferent matters; gradually she introduced a variety of questions regarding the guard's name, country, home, employment, happiness and misery. The man was highly satisfied with the display of so much interest in him and his on the part of Bimala. Seeing the opportunity, she began to take out sharpened arrows from her quiver. On the one hand, her honied converse,—on the other, the unerring discharge of the flowery arrows;—these conspired to usher in the 'melting mood.' When Bimala perceived from the guard's manner that his ruin was not distant, she said in a soft, sweet tone,

"O! I am strangely afraid, Shaikhji. Will you kindly sit by me?"

The guard was in ecstacies,—he came up and sat beside Bimala. After a little talk on other matters, Bimala saw that her medicine had begun to work, for ever since he had sat by her, the guard was casting his glances 'frequent and full' at her.

"Shaikhji, I see you are perspiring awfully; if you do but once release my hands, I can fan you a little—after that, you can bind me again."

Not a drop of perspiration was visible on the guard's forehead; but Bimala must undoubtedly have seen it, why else should she say so? Further, to be fanned by such a hand! To whom is it given to enjoy such a luxury? Reflecting thus, the sentinel immediately loosened her hands.

Bimala fanned the guard a little with her sheet, and then without the least let or hinderance wore it over her body. The guard could not think of re-binding her, and there was indeed a particular reason for this. When instead of serving as a cord, the sheet graced Bimala's person, her charms began to burn the brighter—those charms at sight of which in the glass, Bimala had smiled in the morning, struck the guard dumb.

"Shaikhji," said she, "doesn't your wife love you?"

"Why should you think so?" asked the Shaikhji.

"Only if she did," said Bimala, "how could she in such a spring time (then the dog-star was raging, about to usher in the wet season!) endure the absence of such a husband?"

A deep sigh was the answer!

The arrows were flying out incessantly from Bimala's quiver.

"Shaikhji, I feel shame to confess it, but were you my husband, I would never suffer you to go to war."

The sentinel again sighed. Bimala went on,

"O that you were my husband!" and here she too fetched a little sigh, at the same time casting a side-glance full of love. The sentinel was wrought up beyond bearing. By degrees, he drew nearer and nearer to Bimala, who imitated him. Their bodies now came into actual contact; the guard was all excitement!

Bimala placed her silken-soft hand in that of the sentinel; the man was ravished!

"I am ashamed to speak thus," said Bimala, "but if you go away victorious, will you remember me any more?"

Guard. "Shall I ever forget you?"

Bimala. "Shall I open to you my heart?"

Guard. "Do so,—Prithee speak out."

Bimala. "No, I shan't. What will you think when you come to hear it?"

Guard. "No, no; speak out, I beseech you. Take me but your bond-slave."

Bimala. "I am very anxious to fly with you, and stain the name of this cursed husband."

Again the same side-look darting love. The guard cut capers for very joy.

Guard. "Eh? Will you do so?"

Diggaja, come and see there are other sensible people like you under the sun!

"I shall be really delighted to go," said Bimala, "if you kindly take me with you."

"Shall I not take you? I shall ever rest your slave."

"O how can I requite your boundless love! A trifle as it is, pray accept it."

Thereupon she took the gold chain from off her neck, and placed it on that of the sentry. The man was at once carried up to the seventh heaven! Bimala went on,

"Our *shāstras* declare that when one person places her garland on another person's neck,—this constitutes marriage."

The guard's teeth stared as he laughed.

"Ha! then we have been married sure," exclaimed he.

"To be sure," said Bimala, and seemed plunged in thought.

"What are you thinking about, eh?" enquired the guard.

Bimala. "No, I am not destined for happiness—meseems your people will never be able to take the castle."

"Never doubt it; by this time the castle is almost ours."

"Oh no"—said Bimala; "there's a very particular secret about this matter."

"What's it, pray?" enquired the sentry.

"I reveal it to you, if you can compass the capture of the castle."

The sentinel prepared to listen with parted lips; Bimala feigned disinclination to speak out.

"What's the matter, eh?" impatiently asked the sentinel

"You don't know," said Bimala "that Jagat Singha is lying close to the castle with ten thousand men. Knowing that you would come here secretly, he had laid an ambush before you came. Now he wont stir, but when victory shall make you repose in fancied security, he will come up and surround you."

The sentry was struck dumb.

"How's that?" exclaimed he.

Bimala. "These tidings are not unknown to any of the inmates, and I have also heard them."

The guard was in raptures.

"My soul! this day you have made me. I'll go and tell it to the general. By bearing such important news, I shall earn a reward. Stay you here; I'll be back soon."

There was not a shadow of doubt in his mind as to the fidelity of Bimala.

"But will you come back?" asked she.

Guard. "Presently."

Bimala. "O forget me not."

Guard. "Never, never."

Bimala. "Nay, I conjure you by my life."

"Why do you fear?" said the sentry and off he went.

No sooner was he out of sight than Bimala slipped away;—thus verifying the saying of Osman, "there's danger only in the eyes of Bimala."

CHAPTER XX.

FROM ROOM TO ROOM.

After regaining her freedom, Bimala conceived it to be her first duty to bring intelligence of the disaster to Virendra Singha; and with this view in breathless haste she directed her steps towards Virendra's bed-chamber.

She had not gone half-way when the war-cry of *allalla** *ho!* burst upon her ear.

"Is it the victorious shout of the Pathan soldiers?" exclaimed she distractedly. A loud uproar then breaking upon her ear convinced her that the inmates of the castle had risen up.

Flying to Virendra Singha's bed-room, Bimala witnessed the same noise and bustle there, the Pathans having broken open the door and entered the room. She peeped in and discovered Virendra with his waist fast bound, playing his sword like a maniac—his body deluged with blood. His exertions were presently rendered fruitless, for by a stroke of a long sword of a powerful Pathan, his weapon flew from his grasp and fell at a distance; Virendra Singha was taken prisoner.

* *Alla* in Arabic means God.

Filled with despair at what she saw and heard, she left the place. Thinking that there was time yet to save Tilottama, she ran for the place. While on her way, she perceived it to be no easy task to go to Tilottama,—the Pathan soldiers having overspread every creek and corner of the castle. There could be no room for doubt that the enemy had taken the castle.

Bimala saw that on her way to Tilottama's chamber, she should fall into the hands of Pathan soldiers. She immediately turned. Utterly distracted, she bethought herself how she could, in this time of imminent peril, bring Jagat Singha and Tilottama, tidings of the disaster. She was thinking of this, when she saw some soldiers coming that way after plundering another room. Exceedingly terrified, she hastily hid herself behind a chest. The men entered the room and began to plunder it. Bimala saw that there was no chance of her escaping their hands, for when they would come to the chest, she should certainly be discovered. Mustering courage, she remained there for a little while, and cautiously peeping over the edge of the chest, began to watch the proceedings of the soldiers. She was endowed with matchless courage;—her courage rose with the prospect of danger. While they were each occupied in plundering, she emerged from her place of concealment, and with stealthy steps attempted to slip away. Bent on plunder, the men did not see her,—she was on the point of leaving the door, when a soldier came up from behind, and caught hold of her hand. She turned and saw—Rahim Shaikh!

"Now, run-away," exclaimed he, "where shall you go now!"

Falling a second time into the grasp of Rahim, Bimala turned pale; but this lasted for a moment. Through the force

of her powerful intellect, her face was again restored to cheerfulness.

"I must" thought she, "secure my end through this very fellow! Hush!" said she, "soft, come with me."

Saying this, she took Rahim's hand, and dragged him out. The man followed nothing loth.

"O fie!" said Bimala, when they were alone, "is this your deed? Where did you go, leaving me? There's not a place which I have not searched for you." Again the same loving side-glance! The ire of the magnanimous Shaikh was quenched.

"I searched for the general," said he, "to give him information of Jagat Singha. Failing to find him, I came back to the roof, but missed you. I have since been looking for you in every direction."

"Seeing your delay," said Bimala, "I concluded you had forgotten me; and have accordingly come in search of you. But now what's the use of delaying any longer? Your people have captured the castle; and it is time we got ready for our flight."

"Not to-night," answered Rahim, "to-morrow morning. How shall I go without telling it to the general? Next morning, I will take his leave and go."

"Let us go then," returned Bimala, "and at once secure my ornaments and that sort of thing,—or else some other soldiers may steal them."

"Very well," replied the soldier. The object of Bimala in taking Rahim with her was simply to escape the hands of other soldiers; and a circumstance which happened soon after, bore

testimony to the sagacity of her foresight. They had not gone far, when they came upon a second party of marauders. On seeing Bimala, they cried out, "A wench! a wench! a wench!"

"Mind your several affairs, comrades," said Rahim; "don't look this way."

The soldiers understood and desisted. "Rahim," said one, "you are lucky, only if the general do not wrest the dear morsel from your mouth."

Rahim and Bimala passed on. Bimala took Rahim to a room below her bed-chamber.

"This is my nether chamber," said she; "collect whatever in it you choose. Above this is my bed-chamber. I'll go and bring thence my ornaments and such gear." Saying this, she threw him down a bunch of keys.

Finding the room loaded with articles, Rahim eagerly fell to unlocking the chests. Not a vestige of doubt now lingered in his mind as to Bimala's perfect honesty of purpose. On coming out, she fixed the fastening chain from the outside and locked the door. Rahim remained a prisoner in the room.

Bimala then ran upstairs. Tilottama's and her own apartment lay far removed in the interior of the castle, so that the plundering soldiery did not yet reach so far,—nay, it might well be doubted whether Tilottama and Jagat Singha had yet heard the din and the clamour. Instead of at once entering the chamber, impelled by curiosity, Bimala began to view the manner of the lovers through a chink in the door. Who can over-ride nature! Bimala could afford to be curious at such a terrible moment. She was rather surprised at what she saw.

Tilottama was seated on the couch; Jagat Singha stood by, holding the lily hands of the beauteous damsel. Jagat Singha was also wiping his eyes.

"This is perhaps the watery passage of Farewell," thought Bimala. "Whatever it may be, certain it is that these two have not yet dreamt the impending disaster. O! Love alone is mighty in this world! In this universal hubbub, he has rendered this couple stone deaf, although they possess the sense of hearing."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RENCOUNTER.

When Bimala entered and informed Jagat Singha of the impending calamity, he could not at first believe her. But the noise and din just then bursting upon their ears, at once dispelled his doubts.

"Pray, Sir, devise some instant means of escape, or we perish here!"

For a moment Jagat Singha was plunged in thought.

"What's Virendra Singha doing?" asked he.

"He's a captive in the hands of the enemy," answered Bimala.

Tilottama uttered a faint shriek and sank down senseless on the couch.

Jagat Singha turned pale. "Help, help! ho!" he exclaimed; "look to Tilottama."

Instantly Bimala took a vessel containing rose-water, and began to sprinkle it over Tilottama's mouth, neck and forehead;—

as well as to fan her with a troubled heart. The uproar drew nearer and nearer.

"There they come, Prince," cried out Bimala. "How shall we save ourselves?"

"God of Heaven!" exclaimed Jagat Singha, his eyes flashing fire. "Is this thy will? Am I destined at such a moment of peril to remain cooped up here with women!"

This hurt the pride of the haughty Bimala.

"And what's the earthly need, Prince?" retorted she, her eyes filling with tears. "If I can do no better I will at least die by the side of Tilottama."

The Prince was touched. "How can I go," replied he, "leaving Tilottama in this plight? I will also die for her sake."

The fearful cry approached nearer every moment;—the clang of arms also now became audible."

"Tilottama Tilottama!" exclaimed Bimala, "O! why are you senseless at such a moment! How shall I save you!"

Tilcttama opened her eyes. "Tilottama has revived," said Bimala "Prince! Prince! there's time yet to save her."

"Nothing in heaven and earth," said he, "can avail us here. Could we yet leave the room, I could probably take you out of the castle. But, alas! Tilottama is helpless! Bimala, look! there they ascend the stairs. I will first lay down my life,—but the regret is that I shan't be able to save you even at such a cost."

In a twinkling Bimala took up Tilottama and said,

"Very well Sir, I'll carry Tilottama."

In an instant Bimala and Jagat Singha reached the door, when four Pathan soldiers swiftly ran up.

"'Tis too late, Bimala," said Jagat Singha. "Fall back behind me."

Seeing their prey before them, the men set up their war-cry of *Allalla ho*, and leapt forward like devils. The arms around their loins rang as they descended. Their cry had scarcely died away when the sword of Jagat Singha was planted deep in the breast of one of them. The man expired, crying frightfully. Before the Prince could extricate his weapon, the spear-point of another Pathan ran towards his neck; but before it could alight, swift as lightning, with his left hand he arrested its course, and with one thrust of that same spear, prostrated his adversary. In a moment, the two remaining Pathans simultaneously aimed their blows at Jagat Singhá's head; but without pausing to take breath, he lopped off the fore-arm of one, but could not parry the blow of the other,—which without alighting on his head, inflicted a severe blow on his shoulder. On receiving the wound, the Prince grew doubly frantic, like a tiger smitten by the hunter's arrow; and scarcely had the Pathan attempted to strike again, when with both hands grasping his bloody weapon with his whole strength and spirit, the Prince leapt forward and by one blow severed the head of his enemy with the turban on. Meanwhile the man who had lost his arm, drew out a sharp dagger from his waist by the left hand, and aimed at the Prince's body. As the latter was descending from his leap, the poniard went deep into his spacious arm. Considering the wound as nothing more than the pricking of a needle, he administered such a tremendous kick to the man's waist as fairly flung him at a distance. The

Prince hastened to cut off the Pathan's head, when with the terrible cry of *Allalla ho*; countless Pathans began to stream into the chamber. He now perceived that further fighting could only end in his certain destruction.

His body was dripping with blood, and he was being fast enfeebled by loss of blood.

Tilottama was still lying senseless in the lap of Bimala, who was weeping. Her clothes were drenched with the Prince's blood.

The chamber was now full of Pathans.

Supporting himself on his sword, the Prince took breath for a moment.

"Slave" exclaimed a soldier, "surrender yourself. We will not take your life."

This added fresh fuel to the expiring fire; the prince leapt forward like a flame and cutting off the man's head, placed it beneath his feet. Then flourishing his weapon in the air, he called out,

"Ye Javanas* ! see how a Rajpoot dies."

His sword played like lightning. Perceiving that regular fighting was no longer possible, he determined to die after slaying as many of the enemy as possible. With this view, he dived into the thick of the hostile force, and with both hands holding his sword with an iron grasp, began to deal incessant blows, without in the least heeding his own safety. One—two—three,—every blow either prostrated or mutilated a Pathan. Blows now began to pour in upon him like hail. His arms grew fainter and fainter from bleeding; his head became dizzy; his eyes grew dim; his ears could hear only an indistinct noise.

* A term of contempt to distinguish foreigners,—who were considered as impure

"None shall take the Prince's life,—the tiger must be caged alive."

The Prince could hear no more. Osman Khan had spoken these words.

The Prince's arms relaxed and hung loosely down; from his grasp, his sword fell down with a clang. He fell senseless over the body of a Pathan slain by him.

Some twenty Pathans rushed to rob the gem which crested the Prince's turban, but Osman Khan said in a voice of thunder,

"Don't touch the Prince, on peril of your lives."

All desisted. Osman Khan and another soldier took up the Prince and laid him on the couch. It was a moment before that Jagat Singha indulged in the fond hope of one day sitting on that couch in company with Tilottama after their nuptials. That couch now became his bed of arrows (Sarasayyá).*

After setting down Jagat Singha, Osman enquired,

"Where are the women?"

Osman did not see Bimala and Tilottama. When the soldiers rushed into the room the second time, she read the future; and finding no other means, had hidden herself with Tilottama under the couch.

"Where are the women?" said Osman not finding them. "Search through the castle. The attendant woman is fearfully clever; and I shall be ill at ease should she escape. But have a care. Let no rudeness be shown to Virendra's daughter."

Some of the soldiers went to the other parts of the castle: one or two began to look about the room. After searching

* It is a classical image.

in other directions, one of them took a lamp and looked under the couch. Discovering the object of his search, the man said,

"They are here, Sir."

"Are they ?" enquired Osman Khan eagerly.

Answer. "Yes, Sir, they are."

Osman's countenance brightened.

"Come out," said he, "no fear."

Bimala first came out and then bringing out Tilottama, made her sit down. The latter was reviving, and could therefore sit up.

"Where are we ?" she slowly asked Bimala.

"Never fear," whispered Bimala into her ear, "just veil yourself."

"May it please Your Excellency" said the man who had discovered the women, "I have discovered the women."

"You are asking for a reward," said Osman. "What's your name ?"

"My name is Karim Baksh," replied the man. "But no one knows me by that name. Formerly I was in the Mogal army, and people call me 'the Mogal officer,' by way of jest."

Bimala shuddered. Abhiram Swami's astrological calculation came to her recollection.

"Well, I'll remember," said Osman.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

AESHA.

When Jagat Singha opened his eyes, he found himself in a handsome chamber and lying upon a couch. He could not remember ever having been in the place before. The room was spacious and richly furnished. The marble-paved floor was covered with a soft carpet, over which were ranged rose-water pots and other articles of silver, gold, ivory and such things. Blue screens hung in front of the doors, and softened ere they admitted the day into the chamber. The place was perfumed with various odours.

All was still as death. A maid-servant was noiselessly fanning the Prince with a fan sprinkled with fragrant waters; another stood at a little distance mute and motionless as a statue. Beside the Prince on the ivory-inlaid couch sat a woman engaged in applying some salve to his wounds. On the carpet below sat a well-dressed Pathan, chewing betel and reading a Persian work. But none was speaking or breaking the utter silence of the place.

The Prince looked round. He tried to turn but could not do so on account of severe pain all over his body.

"Be still, Sir. Don't move," said the woman beside him in a soft, sweet tone.

"Where am I?" enquired the Prince faintly.

"Pray Sir, be quiet," said she in the same musical tone. "You are in a proper place, Sir. Don't be uneasy. Don't speak."

"What's the time now?" asked the Prince still more faintly.

"'Tis afternoon" replied she "Be quiet, I beseech you. You won't come all right if you talk; and we must leave the place."

"One word more,"—said he with an effort, "who are you,?"

"Aesha," replied the damsel.

The Prince fell to studying Aesha's countenance in silence. Had he seen her before? No.

Aesha might be twenty-two. She was beautiful to a degree; but it is not possible to depict that style of beauty in a word or two. Tilottama also was exceedingly beautiful; but Aesha's beauty was not of that type. The charms of the ever young Bimala also fascinated people; but neither could they claim fellowship with Aesha's transcendental graces. The loveliness of some damsels is like the blossoming of the vernal *Mallika**—fresh-blooming, closing for bashfulness, tender, serenely bright and deliciously fragrant. Tilottama was such an one. Some women are like the afternoon *Stala-padma*,† odourless, about to close, wanting moisture, yet graceful, full-blown, splendid and ripe with honey. Such were the charms of Bimala. Aesha resembled

* A species of the jasmine.

† Land-lotus.

the lotus expanding itself to the rosy touch of the morning sun—so beautifully blooming, so exquisitely fragrant, so overflowing with honey, so resplendent; neither closing nor lacking moisture, and 'clothed with transcendent brightness.' The rays of the sun are beaten off by the expanded leaves, yet its face ever beams with a smile. O reader, have you ever witnessed 'beauty's splendour'? You may at least have heard of such a thing. Many a fair one illumines all round with her beauty. The daughter-in-law of many a man illumines his home. In the land of *Vraja** and in the war of *Nisumbha*,† the world was ablaze with dark lustre. But has the gentle reader now understood what I mean by 'beauty's splendour'? Bimala shined in beauty but her light was that of the *pradipa*,‡ somewhat dim, wanting oil, though sufficient for domestic use; it can light you from room to room; with it you can cook your food, prepare your bed &c; but you must not touch it, on pain of being burnt. Tilottama too shined in beauty but her light was like the soft rays of the crescent moon—pure, balmy, cool, but ill fitted for daily use, not powerful and coming from afar. Aesha shined in beauty, and it was the full effulgence of the mid-day sun,—flaming, darting myriads of rays and imprinting a laugh on whatever it fell.

What the lotus is to the garden is Aesha to this story; and I am therefore anxious to make the reader realize her form and face. Were I gifted with a cunning pencil—could I prepare that color—not *champaka*-like, nor red, nor yet like the unblown white lotus, but a happy mixture of all three—could

* *Vraja* was the scene of Krishna's amours.

† *Nisumbha* was a demon killed by Kali,—the personification of the cosmic force.

‡ The common earthen lamp used by Bengalis.

I truthfully paint that forehead of hers, so faultlessly round and deliciously expansive—the very field of Cupid—over which appeared the fine curves of her hair,—could I prolong them as finely over her smooth and round forehead—could I turn them off in the same way over her ears—could I paint her black silken hair,—could I in the same way part them above her forehead—could I dress them in the same neat and elegant fashion—could I weave her dangling braid—could I depict those dense eyebrows—could I show how they attempted to kiss each other and how by gentle degrees attaining bulk they visibly increased in breadth ere they had yet reached the middle, and then by as soft gradations ended in an exquisitely fine point near her hair—could I show all this—could I moreover paint those tender, nimble lids which looked like clouds flashing with lightning—could I transfer to the canvass the expanse of those eyes—the graceful curves of the upper and lower lids—that azure lustre so finely touched with red—those dark pupils—that acquiline nose with nostrils dilated with pride—those lips, the home of Nature's sweets—that alabaster neck over which fell her braid—those full blown cheeks which ever and anon attemped to kiss her pendants—those fully developed, delicate arms shining with gems—those fingers before which the gems on the rings grew pale—those hands which in hue might vie with the land-lotus—the pomp and grandeur of her swelling bust, which shamed the brightness of the pearl chain which fell over it—the 'mighty magic' of her stature,

"O call it middle not tall!"

Could I do all this, yet I would not touch the pencil Aesha's beauty was the only reality in this unreal world;—she was the

master work of nature's hand ;— her side-glance was like the blu e lotus waving in the evening breeze. Ah! how can I hope to paint her without the help of inspiration ?

The Prince gazed at Aesha. Immediately the thought of Tilottama arose in his mind ; and he felt the iron entering his soul. The blood coursed violently through his veins, and gushed out afresh from the deep wounds ; he closed his eyes and sank in insensibility. The lovely lady on the couch immediately arose. The person who sat on the carpet reading, from time to time lifted his eyes from the book and saw Aesha lovingly ;—for a long while he gazed with insatiate eyes at her waving pendants, as she arose. Aesha softly approached to him and whispered into his ear,

"Osman, send for the physician, sharp"; for it was no other than the conqueror of the castle. On receiving this communication, he went out. Aesha took a vessel which stood upon a silver stool, and drenched the prince's forehead and face with some liquid.

Osman Khan soon came back with the physician, who after a variety of expedients succeeded in stopping the bleeding and handed to Aesha various medicines, giving directions in a low tone for their use.

"Pray, what do you think of him, Sir," said she in the physician's ear.

"O the fever is awful!" replied he.

He saluted them and was going out, when Osman overtook him near the door and asked him in an undertone,

"What do you think of his recovery, Sir?"

"I am not hopeful, you know," said he, "but please call me again, when the fit returns."

CHAPTER II.

THE FLOWER-EMBOSOMED STONE

THAT night Aesha and Osman sat up by Jagat Singha till a late hour. Now he was becoming conscious and now he became insensible ;—the physician came and went many a time and oft.

Aesha was ceaseless in her attentions to the Prince. When it struck twelve a maid entered in and said that the *Begam* had sent for her.

"I go," said she and rose up. Osman rose with her.

"You also up ?"—asked she.

"It is late; let me convoy you."

Aesha instructed the servants to be watchful, and then directed her steps to her mother's apartment.

"Do you mean to stay with the *Begam* to-night?" asked Osman on the way.

"No," replied Aesha. "I shall return to the Prince."

"Aesha," said Osman, "your goodness nothing can equal. A sister does not more for her brother than you are doing for this mortal enemy of your father. You are actually rescuing him from the jaws of death."

"Osman," said Aesha, a gentle laugh illuminating her countenance, "Nature has made me a woman, and as such it is my first of duties to tend the sick. It would indeed be a great sin in me to neglect it, but I can claim no merit for doing my duty. But how does it touch you? That you are daily watching and striving hard for the recovery of one who is your mortal foe, who is your opponent in the field, ever bent on humbling your pride—of one reduced to this pass by your own hands;—that you are doing all this for such an one can but redound to your credit."

"You, Aesha," said Osman, thrown a little out of countenance, "look on the world as partaking of your own sweet nature. My motive, you must know, is not so virtuous as you think. Don't you perceive what gainers we shall be if Jagat Singha come all right? Should the Prince now die, what do we gain by it? In the field, Man Singha is not inferior to his son; so that instead of one warrior we shall have another to cope with. But if we can keep Jagat Singha in durance when he recovers, we have Man Singha on the hip;—he shall certainly be obliged to offer us favorable terms for the liberation of his beloved son,—nay, Akbar too shall consider peace proposals seriously, to get back such an able officer. Further, if we can lay Jagat Singha under an obligation by treating him generously, he also will lend his influence to bring about the conclusion of a treaty favorable to us;—and his endeavours may not go for nothing. At any rate, we cannot miss a good round sum as his ransom. His life then, you see, is more valuable to us than even a victory in open fight."

No doubt these considerations weighed with Osman in determining his present conduct, but there was something more.

It is the way with some men to give themselves out as hard-hearted, fearing to be convicted of the taint of the 'milk of human kindness,' and they do good with a perpetual sneer at kindness, as an effeminate quality. When pressed for explanation, they seek refuge in such expressions as, "O, sir, content you, herein I serve my turn." Aesha well knew Osman was one of this class.

"Osman," said she laughing, "would to Heaven, all were as selfish and far-sighted as you. Goodness could then very well be dispensed with."

After an attempt at shuffling, Osman said in a softer tone,

"That I am selfish, I will show by another instance."

Aesha fixed her eyes on Osman, like a cloud surcharged with lightning—Osman continued,

"I am living on Hope; how long shall I remain her borrower?"

Aesha looked grave; Osman now saw new beauties rising to the view. "Speak to papa about it, pray," said she. "You know he can deny you nothing."

Osman. "I have not left untried that quarter."

Aesha. "And what does he say?"

Osman. "He has pledged his word to the *Begam* that he will give you to the man of your own choice. But to this day, I have not known your mind."

Again her sweet countenance gleamed through a smile.

"Pray, when have men," said she, "been able to read the thoughts of women?"

Osman.—"What am I to understand by this?"

Aesha. "That I do love you." Osman's handsome face brightened with joy.

"As your future husband, eh?" enquired he.

"As my dearest brother."

Osman's countenance fell.

"God! God! ever on that key!" ejaculated he. "God of Heaven, in such a flowery frame hast thou closed in a heart of stone!"

After conveying Aesha to her mother's apartment, Osman returned to his quarters, with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER III.

"AR'N'T YOU TILOTTAMA?"

In the evening of the next day, Aesha, Osman and the physician were seated in silence in the room where Jagat Singha was lying. Aesha was seated on the couch, engaged in fanning the Prince and that sort of thing; the physician was momentarily feeling his pulse. The Prince was insensible. The physician had said, "Most probably he dies when the fever remits. If he escape that, he will surely be cured."

The remission was fast approaching; and it was for this reason that all were held in breathless suspense. The physician was incessantly feeling the Prince's pulse. "Low," "lower still," "a little high,"—such were his frequent exclamations in a suppressed tone.

All of a sudden his face grew pale.

"The time is come" said he. Aesha and Osman listened motionless—the leech kept holding Jagat Singha's pulse.

"The state 's bad" said he after a while, "the pulse irregular." Aesha's face grew pale. Suddenly Jagat Singha's face became white and showed an unnatural expression, his fists clenched fast, his eyes manifested a preternatural twinkling. Aesha understood that the *coup de grace* of the Destroyer was not distant. The physician who sat ready with his medicine, seeing the symptoms opened the patient's mouth and poured in the drug. The change was electric. By and bye, his face re-assumed its natural expression and composed. The whiteness which spread over his body disappeared, the blood renewed its free circulation, his fists relaxed, and his eyes closed in composure. The physician felt his pulse, all attention.

"No fear any more" exclaimed he joyfully, after a long while, "he will recover."

"Has the fever gone off?" enquired Osman

"It has" answered the follower of Esculapius.

Both Aesha and Osman now looked cheerful. "There is no more danger" said the physician. "I needn't wait any more. Let the patient take this medicine every now and then up to twelve o'clock." He then went away. After a while, Osman too went to his house. Aesha sat as before on the couch beside the Prince, tending him.

A little before midnight, he opened his eyes. The first sight that struck him was Aesha's cheerful countenance. From his side-glance, Aesha gathered that his mind was wandering, he looked like one who tried to recall some thing, but without success.

"Where am I?" asked he, after looking long at Aesha. This was the first time that he spoke after two days.

"In the fort of Katlu Khan," replied Aesha.

The Prince again tried to recollect some thing.

"Why am I here?" said he after a long pause.

Aesha was at first silent.

"You are ill, Sir," said she.

"No, no, I am a captive," said the prince musing and shaking his head; his features now underwent a change.

Aesha made no reply; she found that the Prince's power of recollection was reviving.

"Who are you, I pray?"—again asked he after a pause.

"My name is Aesha."

"Who is Aesha, beseech you?"

"The daughter of Katlu Khan."

The Prince was again silent, lacking strength to talk for a long time together,

"For how many days am I here, pray?" asked he after a pause.

"These four days."

"Is Garmandaran still in your possession?"

"It is, Sir."

Jagat Singha again paused a little.

"What has become of Virendra Singha?" enquired he.

"He is a prisoner. To-day his trial takes place."

Paler grew the pale countenance of Jagat Singha.

"Pray, how fare the other inmates of the castle?"

"I don't know every thing," answered Aesha anxiously.

The Prince muttered something to himself. A name escaped his lips ; Aesha heard it :

"Tilottama."

Aesha rose softly and went to bring the palatable medicine given by the physician.

The Prince fell to observing the matchless perfections of Aesha's person, as her pendants kept waving to and fro. She returned with the medicine. After drinking it, the Prince said,

"When lying insensible, I dreamt that a nymph of heaven sat at my head engaged in tending me. Isn't she you, Tilottama?"

"You may have dreamt of Tilottama, gentle Sir," replied Aesha.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADY OF THE VEIL.

Two days after the capture of the fortress, about noon, Katlu Khan was holding his court in the fortress. On two sides stood his courtiers in array. On the tract of land in front, an immense crowd stood in silence. That day would take place the trial of Virendra Singha.

Several armed guards brought in Virendra. His face was overspread with crimson; but there was no trace of fear in it ; his flaming eyes threw out scintillations of fire ; his nostrils

dilated and quivered; he bit his nether lip. When he was brought up, Katlu Khan said,

"Virendra Singha, this day I will try you for treason. Why did you assume a hostile attitude towards me?"

Virendra's face reddened. He suppressed his anger and said,

"Let me first know what I have done?"

"Be more respectful, Sir," said a courtier

"Why didn't you," asked Katlu Khan, "send me men and money?"

"You are a rebel," replied the undaunted Virendra; "one might well call you a robber. Wherefore should I give you money; wherefore supply you with troops?"

The spectaters perceived that Virendra was preparing his own ruin.

Katlu Khan's frame shook with passion; but he had learnt to master his emotions with promptitude.

"Living in my domains," said he somewhat calmly, "why did you join the Mogul?"

"And where are your domains, may I enquire?" asked Virendra.

"Listen, miscreant," exclaimed Katlu Khan in a rage, "Listen, varlet, you shall meet your deserts. You could hope for your life; but you are mad. Your pride has undone you."

"Katlu Khan," said Virendra laughing scornfully, "when I came before you, I never expected mercy at your hands; and what's the earthly need of a life saved through the mercy of an enemy like you? If you could rest satisfied with only taking my life, I would gladly lay it down, wishing you well. But you have stained me and mine; my life of life you have—"

He could no longer contain himself. His utterance was choked; his eyes filled with tears; the dauntless, haughty Virendra Singha hung down his head and wept like a child.

Katlu Khan was constitutionally hard;—so much so that he delighted in the pain of a fellow-creature. Seeing the plight of his proud enemy, his face betokened joy.

"Virendra Singha," said he, "would you ask anything at my hands? Consider, Sir, your end is near."

Tears had brought relief to the burning heart.

"Nothing save this," answered Virendra calmly, "order my execution soon."

Katlu. "It shall be so; any thing more?"

Answer. "Nothing in this life."

Katlu. "Would you not look your last upon your daughter?"

At this the spectators became silent for grief. Fire sparkled in Virendra's eyes.

"What!" cried he; "will nothing less satisfy you than trampling under foot this crushed heart?" He then continued with less vehemence, "Do so; I am powerless in this life. But in the next you shall answer for it before the tribunal of God."

This touched the heart of Katlu Khan; for is there a sinner whose heart trembles not at the sound of that dread Name?

"No more" said he; "executioner, do your office."

Silence held that vast concourse of people in breathless suspense; so much so that the fall of a needle could have been heard.

The guards led Virendra to the place of execution. He had not yet reached it, when a Musalman whispered something into his ear. Virendra could not understand it. The individual

then handed him a letter. Musing and absent, he opened it and saw that it was in Bimala's handwriting. He crumpled and threw it away from him, with signs of great displeasure. The bearer took it up and went away.

At this a spectator who was close by said to another in a low tone,

"Perhaps, Sir, 'tis a letter from his daughter."

Hearing this, Virendra turned round and said,

"Who speaks of my daughter? I have no daughter."

When the bearer of the note departed, he said to the guards, "Await my return."

"All right, Your Excellency," replied they.

Osman himself was the bearer, and it was for this reason that the guards applied to him the epithet of "Excellency."

Taking the note, Osman went to the bottom of the wall of the inner apartment. There stood a veiled lady. Osman came to her, and after casting his eyes round, related to her all that had happened.

"I am giving you infinite trouble" said she; "but you must remember it is you who have reduced us to this pass. You must threfore do me this turn."

Osman said nothing.

"If you refuse it," continued she of the veil, in a voice trembling with emotion, "I am helpless;—but God will judge."

"Mother," said Osman, "you don't know what a perilous task you are laying upon me. Katlu Khan will take my life, if he come to know it."

"Katlu Khan?" returned the woman. "Why are you deceiving me? Katlu Khan dares not touch a hair of your head."

Osman. "You do not know Katlu Khan. But come, I will take you to the execution-ground." When they came to the spot, Virendra, who was conversing with a Brahmin disguised as a beggar, did not mark her. The woman looked from within her veil and recognised the Brahmin to be Abhiramswami.

"Sire," said Virendra, "here then I make my last obeisance to you. What more shall I say? Whom have I in this world on whose behalf I should offer up my prayers to Heaven? For whom shall I pray?"

Abhiramswami pointed with his finger to the veiled lady behind. Virendra turned round; anon she threw back her veil and cast herself at the chained feet of Virendra.

"Bimala!" cried he in a choked voice.

"Husband! My life! My all!" she exclaimed in a frenzy, "this day I will proclaim it to the four winds. None shall prevent me. Husband! Life of life! Where are you going—where are you going, leaving us?"

The flood-gate was opened in Virendra's eyes.

"Bimala! Beloved," exclaimed he, lifting her by his arm, "O! why should you make me weep at such a moment! my enemies will think me afraid to die."

Bimala was mute.

"Bimala!" he went on; "Farewell!—Do you follow me straight way."

"No;—after a little delay." Here she proceeded in an inaudible tone. "First I will avenge my wrong."

Virendra's countenance brightened up like an expiring flame.

"By your own hands?" enquired he.

"By this very hand"—said she, pointing her right hand with a finger of the left. "Here I cast away gold from my arms.* What further the need of it?" She thereupon flung away her bracelets and other ornaments at a distance and proceeded, "No more shall these arms of mine bear any ornaments;—but sharp steel must now supply their place."

"You will certainly succeed," said Virendra joyfully. "May Heaven help you."

"I can't wait any longer," cried the executioner.

"Well then, you may go now,"—said Virendra.

"Not so;" replied Bimala. "I will with my own eyes witness the fell stroke that makes me a widow. I will drown all scruples in your blood."

Bimala's voice was awfully calm.

"Be it so," said Virendra. He then made a sign to the executioner. Bimala saw the raised axe flash in the sun; for a moment her eyes closed of themselves; when they opened again, the severed head of Virendra Singha was rolling before her in the bloody dust.

Bimala stood like a statue; not a hair of her head waving in the wind; not a tear standing in her eye. Without shrinking, she fixed her gaze steadily upon the severed head.

* Hindu widows do not wear ornaments.

CHAPTER V.



THE WIDOW.

WHERE is Tilottama? Ah! where the fatherless, forlorn girl? Where is Bimala? Whence had Bimala come to the place of execution? Where did she go after that grim proceeding?

Why did not Virendra Singha seek an interview with his beloved daughter in his last moments? Why did his wrath kindle at the simple mention of her name? Why had he exclaimed, "I have no daughter!" Why had he flung away Bimala's letter without even perusing it? Ah! why? Bring but your recollection Virendra's rebuke of Katlu Khan and see what a terrible thing had taken place.

"You have stained me and mine." had roared out the chained lion.

Do you ask where Tilottama and Bimala are? Search the seraglio of Katlu Khan and you will find them.

'Tis the way of the world! Such is the inexorable turning of Fortune's wheel! Youth, beauty, sincerity, purity—all, all are crushed out by its relentless pressure.

Katlu Khan had made a rule that whenever any beautiful woman should be taken captive in the capture of any village or

fort, she should be sent for his pleasure. The day after the capture of Garmandaran, he went to the place and was engaged in disposing of the prisoners, in placing a garrison there and that sort of thing. On seeing Bimala and Tilottama among his captives, he forthwith sent them to enrich his harem. He was afterwards engrossed with other matters. He had heard that the Rajpoot army on hearing of the captivity of their leader, lay close, meditating an attack. He was therefore engaged in providing means for expelling them in case of an attack, and could not consequently find time to enjoy the company of his new slaves.

Bimala and Tilottama were kept in seperate chambers. Reader, no use of casting a look where the tender, youthful, fatherless girl is rolling in the dust, her person covered with dust. What is the good of doing that? Who will now cast a glance at Tilottama? When decked in bud and blossom, the fresh shrub waves a welcome to the Spring, who does not court it for its fragrance? And in a summer-storm, when down it goes with the tree round which it has entwined its embraces, who goes to it, leaving the up-rooted trees? The woodman takes away the wood only, the shrub he tramples under foot.

Come, reader, let's go elsewhere. Let's look in where with the flowing end of her cloth over her eyes sits the dusty, grave, mourning widow, instead of the active, clever, gay and sportive Bimala.

Is this Bimala?

Bimala! where is that dressing of your hair? Why is your head so full of dust? Where is your curiously embroidered sheet? Where is your *kanchali* sparkling with gems? What's this? Why is your cloth so dirty? Why with this short cloth on, pray? Where have gone those ornaments—those pendants that ever

and anon longed to kiss your cheeks? Why are your eyes swollen? Ah! where that side-glance? Wherefore is this wound in your forehead? Who has drawn the blood there?

All this has but one answer: Bimala is a widow now. She was waiting for Osman.

Osman was a person of whom the Pathans might justly be proud. He had entered war as a profession and accordingly did not hesitate to do any thing which promised to bring martial success. But when the exigencies of war were at an end, he never allowed the least unnecessary outrage to be committed on the vanquished. Had not Katlu Khan himself reduced Bimala and Tilottama to that pass, they would never have been captives through Osman's hands. It was through his kindness that Bimala succeeded in seeing her husband before his death. When afterwards Osman came to learn that she was the wife of Virendra Singha, his kind heart at once melted. He was the nephew of Katlu Khan; and had leave to go everywhere in the inner apartments. This has already been seen. But the threshold of Katlu's seraglio none could cross—not even his own sons—not even Osman. But he was the right hand of Katlu. It was owing to his strength of arm that Katlu Khan had advanced so far as the shores of the Amodara. Consequently the inmates obeyed Osman even as they did Katlu himself: and it was for this that none hindered Bimala from seeing her husband that morning before his execution.

Two days after this, she gave her remaining ornaments to the maid-servant appointed to serve her. "What's your will, Madam," asked the woman.

"Pray, do you go to Osman, as you did yesterday," said Bimala. "Tell him that I beg him to see me once more.

This is my last request; I will not ask for a like favor again."

The maid-servant did so. Osman said, "There's danger to both of us in my going there. Tell her to see me in my lodgings."

"How can I go?" asked Bimala.

"He has said he would provide for that," returned the menial.

At night-fall one of Aesha's maid-servants came in and after talking something with the eunuchs, who guarded the interior, took Bimala to Osman.

"What more do you require of me, pray?" asked Osman.

"A trifle," said Bimala. "Is the Rajput Prince, Jagat Singha, alive?"

Os. "Yes, he is."

Bi. "Is he a captive?"

Os. "He is a captive but not in prison now. He is bed-ridden because of his wounds."

"Every one connected with these wretched women is destined to fare ill!" exclaimed she. "The hand of God is in all this. Should he recover, pray, do you, Sir, give him this letter. At present let it remain with you. This is my request."

Osman returned the note and said, "Excuse me; I may not do this. In whatever case the Prince may be, he is to be considered a captive now. It is improper to take any letter to such a person without first reading its contents; moreover this is against the orders of my master."

"Believe me, Sir," replied Bimala "it contains nothing which you can take exception to; you may without scruple

convey it. And talk you of your master, Sir? You are your own master."

"In other things," said Osman, "I can act against the wishes of my uncle; but not in this. I perfectly believe you when you say the letter is quite harmless, so far as we are concerned;—but I can not break the rule for its sake. I am powerless to serve you in this matter."

"Well then, you may read it," said Bimala sadly.

Osman took the letter and began to read it.

CHAPTER V.

BIMALA'S LETTER.

"Prince,

I promised that one day I would unfold to you the history of my life. The time has now come for my doing so.

I hoped to narrate my personal history, when Tilottama should have ascended the throne of Abnir. That hope, alas! has been dashed to the ground. In a few days you will probably hear there is no Tilottama on earth—no Bimala. Our days are numbered.

It is for this reason that I am now writing you this note. I am a great sinner—I have committed many sins in my time.

When I shall be no more, people will speak ill of me; what a load of uncharitable things they will heap on my memory! Who then will wipe out the stigma from my name? Who is such a friend?

There is a friend; but he will soon renounce the world and be engaged in austerities. My object will not be gained through Abhiramswami. Prince, for one day at least, I ventured to indulge in the hope of being reckoned among your kindred. Pray, do you, for one day, act like a relative. But to whom am I saying this? The fortunes of these wretched women are like flames; they have touched the friend who was near us. Be that as it may, do you, Sir, remember this petition of your humble servant. When people will say that Bimala was a harlot, that Bimala was a mistress in the guise of maid servant, pray, do you say that Bimala was low-born, Bimala was wretched, that solicited by strong sensual promptings, she committed a thousand wrongs, but Bimala was no harlot. He who is now in heaven, as my good luck would have it, married me in the proper form. My lord did not for a single day suspect me of infidelity.

This was not known so long; who will believe it now? Why, again, being a wife, did I behave like a maid-servant? Listen.

A certain Brahmin, named Sasi Sekhara Bhattacharya, lived in a village adjacent to Garmandaran. Sasi Sekhara was the son of a wealthy Brahmin. In his youth, he received a finished education; but his education could not remove the fault of his character. Although God had lavished upon him every virtue, yet He had implanted in him a certain strong passion: that passion is always strong in youth.

A woman then lived in Garmandaran, who pined for her absent husband, a follower of Jayadhara Singha. She was uncommonly beautiful. Her husband was a soldier in the army of the Emperor, and was long away from home. The woman fell in love with Sasi Shekhara; in a short time, she conceived.

Fire and sin cannot be hid long; the misdeed of Sasi Shekhara reached the ears of his father. With the view of removing the stain cast by his son on the race of another, the father of Sasi Sekhara wrote to the husband of the woman and hastily called him home. He reprimanded his backsliding son severely. Thus disgraced by his parent, Sasi Sekhara left his country.

He went to Benares. There, hearing of the fame of a *dandi*,* who was extraordinarily learned, he began to receive lessons from him. Possessed of an acute intellect, he became proficient in the *darsanas*,† and attained the highest excellence in astrology. The tutor taught him with the greatest delight.

Sasi Sekhara had put up at the house of a *Sudra* woman. She had a blooming daughter. From veneration for a Brahmin the young lady arranged things for his cooking, &c. It is the duty of the child to throw the veil over the shame of the parent. What more shall I say? The *Sudra* girl gave birth to this wretch of a woman.

On coming to know this, the teacher said to his pupil, "My boy, I don't teach wrong-doers. Don't show your face in Benares any more."

Sasi Sekhara left Benares for shame.

My grand-father turned my mother out of his house, as a fallen woman.

* A devotee worshipping *Siva*.

† Hindu Philosophical Systems.

My poor mother came with me to a cottage; she maintained herself and me by bodily labor. None cared for the poor thing; neither could any news be got of father. Several years after, in winter, a wealthy Pathan was going to Delhi from Bengal. He was going through Benares. Arriving at the city late at night, he could not get lodgings. His wife and his babe were with him. Coming to our cottage, he begged permission to spend the night there. "None of the Hindus" said he, "consent to give me shelter. Where shall we go now with this infant? He cannot bear cold. I have not many persons with me, and there will be room enough for us in the cottage here. I will reward you handsomely." The Pathan was hastening to Delhi on some urgent business; he had only one servant with him. My mother was poor as well as kind-hearted; either from love of gold or from compassion for the infant, she allowed the Pathan a place in our cottage. He lay in a part lighted up by a lamp, with his wife and son. In the other, we lay. The populace of Benares were then full of apprehensions for boy-kidnappers. I was then six years old; I can't tell all that happened; I relate what I have learnt from mother.

The lamp was burning at midnight. A thief entered in through a breach, which he made in the wall, and was stealing away the boy of the Pathan. I had then awaked from sleep and saw it. I set up a loud cry, which awakened all.

The wife of the Pathan not finding her child beside her, at once shrieked. The thief was then going out with the boy. The Pathan rushed on the man, drew him by the hair and snatched the boy from him. As the culprit implored hard for mercy, the Pathan let him go after cutting off one of his ears."

Coming up to this point, Osman became plunged in thought. He then said to Bimala,

"Had you no other name before?"

"Yes, I had," replied Bimala. "That is a Musalman name, and father has therefore changed it."

"What's that name? Maharu?"

"How could you know it, Sir?" asked Bimala in surprise.

"I am that very boy," replied Osman.

Bimala was surprised; Osman again began to read.

"Next morning, when the Pathan was about to depart, he said to mother, 'Now I have no means to repay the obligation your daughter has laid me under; but let me know your wish. I am going to Delhi, wherefrom I will send you whatever you require. If you want money, I will send it.'

Mother said, 'I don't want money; I pass my days easily enough by bodily labor. But if you have any influence with the Emperor—'

'Yes, I have,' interposed the Pathan. 'I shall be able to serve you at court.'

Mother said, 'Then, will you kindly try to get news of this girl's father and send it me?'

The Pathan promised to do so. He offered gold to mother, which she declined. According to his promise, the Pathan employed some of the imperial officers to get news of my father; but to no purpose. Fourteen years after this, the men got tidings of my father, and information of it was communicated to mother. He was at Delhi; he had changed his name of Sasi Sekhara Bhattacharjya for Abhiramswami. When this intelligence reached us, mother departed this life. If heaven

can be the portion of a woman who marries without 'sanctimonious and holy rites,' then mother sure has ascended heaven.

When I received tidings of my father, Benares could no more please me, now that mother was no more. There was none on earth to me save father, and when he was at Delhi, why should I be at Benares? Thinking thus, I set out alone for him. At first he was dissatisfied at seeing me; but as I wept bitterly, he allowed me to be engaged in tending him. He changed my former name of Maharu for Bimala. I employed myself in serving father with the greatest assiduity; my attentions were constant and ceaseless. All this was not prompted by any selfishness to secure his love, I really felt an inward delight in serving him. I knew that I had none save him, I thought I had no other happiness on earth save serving my father. Whether it was owing to my respectful attentions or to any other law of human nature, he began to feel an affection for me. Affection is like the flowing river: the more it flows, the more it attains strength. When my dear lord was about to suffer on the execution-ground, then I knew how deeper beyond 'plummet's sounding' was that love."

CHAPTER VII.

BIMALA'S LETTER (CONCLUDED).

I have already told you, Prince, that a certain poor woman living in Garmandaran conceived by my father. Her fate singularly resembled my mother's. She also gave birth to a daughter; and on becoming a widow soon after, began, like my mother, to maintain herself and child by bodily labor. It is not necessarily the case that the product should resemble its source; the tender flowering plant is found in the bosom of mountains; the dark mine produces the burning gem. An 'earth-treading star' rose at the cottage of the poor woman. The daughter of the widow came to be recognised as a paragon in Garmandaran. Time performs wonders; Time blotted out the stain of the widow; many forgot that her daughter owed her birth to an unchaste sheet. Some did not know;—few or none of the inmates of the castle knew it. What more shall I say? That beauty became the mother of Tilottama.

When Tilottama was yet in her mother's womb, took place the principal event in my life,—growing out of this marriage. One day, about that time, father brought in his son-in-law to the cottage. He gave him out as his disciple; I got the true information from my espoused saint.

As soon as my eyes fell on him, my heart ceased to be mine. He came every day to father, and stayed long;—he talked of various things; he told stories. My rapt ear took in the

honied strains,—mentally I sold myself off to him—body and soul; he too did not scorn me. In brief, we came to read each other's thoughts. I spoke with him; his whispering accents still sound in my ears like the music of the spheres.

Although I sold my heart cheap, still the wretched fate of mother was ever present to my mind; I declined to sell the jewel in my dower—virginity. But this in no way cooled his fervour. Father too had come to understand how matters stood. One day I overheard the following conversation between him and my lord.

'I shan't be able to remain anywhere, leaving Bimala,' said father. 'But if she become your wedded wife, then I will live with you. But if your intention be otherwise—'

'Sire!' interposed my lord, somewhat angrily, 'how shall I marry a Sudra woman?'

'And how could you marry the illegitimate girl?' said father sarcastically.

'I did not know that she was such, when I married her,' replied my lord, rather regretfully. 'But how can I marry a Sudri, having full knowledge of the fact? Moreover, your elder daughter, although natural, was not a Sudri.'

'You refuse to marry, then' said my father. 'Well, your visits are objectionable,—you need not come to the cottage. I will see you at your place.'

From that day, he discontinued his visits for a time. Daily I remained eagerly expecting his coming, but in vain. At length, (perhaps being unable to remain still) he again resumed his visits. During his separation, I had known what a thing a lover is. Therefore, during his latter visits, I determined not

to be so bashful as before. Father perceived this. One day, he called me and said, 'You see I have adopted the ascetic life; it is not possible for me to be always with you. I will go on travel. Where you will go when I leave you'

I fell to weeping, apprehensive of my separation from father. 'I will go with you' said I. Anon the thought of my lord occurred to my thoughts; and I said, 'Or I will remain alone as before at Benares.'

'No Bimala,' replied father, 'I have a better plan. I shall provide a good protection for you, when I go. You shall be an attendant of Man Singha's new queen.'

'O! do not leave me, Sir,' cried I.

'No, no,' replied he. 'At present I am not going any where. Do you now go to Man Singha's palace. I will be here for the present, and see you every day. I shall do the needful after satisfying myself as to your reception there.'

Prince, I became an inmate of your house. By this mœnuvre father removed me from the sight of his son-in-law.

Prince, I was an inmate of your father's palace for a long time. But you don't know it. Then you were a mere boy of ten years old, and lived with your mother at the palace at Abnir. It was then that I became engaged in tending your new step-mother, at Delhi. Countless women hung round the neck of Maharaja Man Singha, like flowers in a garland. Do you know all your step-mothers? Will you be able to remember Urmila—the daughter of the chief of Jodhpore? How shall I tell you of Urmila's kindness to me? She did not consider me as a maid-servant and attendant;—she looked upon me as an affectionate sister. Under her fostering care, I received a good education; it

was through her kindness that I learnt embroidery; it was to please her that I learnt music and dancing. She herself taught me letters. That I am able to send you these lines is owing to the kindness of Urmila.

I reaped still better good fortune at the kind hands of Urmila,—she introduced me as favorably to the Maharaja as she loved me. I had attained some proficiency in music and dancing, and the Maharaja took delight in seeing and listening to my performance. Whatever may be the reason, he looked upon me as one belonging to his family. He revered my father, who came often to see me.

I was perfectly happy with the Princess; my only cause of sorrow was that he for whom I was prepared to give up everything, save my honor, could no longer be seen by me. Had he (on his part) forgotten me? No. Prince, do you remember the maid, Ashmani? It may be. I became intimate with Ashmani. I despatched her to bring news of husband. She brought me news of him. What shall I say how much he said in reply! I wrote to him *per* Ashmani. He replied. Thus passed day after day. Even while separated, we conversed with each other.

Three years passed away in this manner. When we did not forget each other after such a long seperation, we understood that our love was not shallow like moss but deep-rooted like the lotus. I don't know why but at last my lord lost all patience. One day he marred every thing. I was lying at night in my chamber alone, when waking suddenly, I saw a man at my head, in the glimmering light.

These words sweetly entered my ear—'My love, don't fear. I am your own.'

What could I reply ? Meeting after three years! I forgot everything.

I caught hold of his neck and wept.

When my speech returned, I asked him, 'How have you come into the inner apartment ?'

'Ask Ashmani' said he. 'I entered the palace with her as a water-carrier. Since then I have been hid.'

'What then now ?' asked I.

'What ?' replied he. 'What you will.'

I thought what I should do ; what way to adopt.

My mind led me to the side which had been espoused by my feelings. I was thinking thus when suddenly the door of my room opened, and stood in my front—Maharaja Man Singha.

What need of details ? My lord was made a prisoner. The Maharaja expressed his intention of punishing him by law. Perhaps you can guess what it was with me. Crying I fell down at the feet of Urmila ; I frankly confessed my indiscretion ; I took the burthen of every offence on my shoulders. On meeting father, I fell at his feet also. The Maharaja used to respect him, he reverenced him as his spiritual guide ; of course (thought I) he would comply with his request. I exhorted, 'Consider the fate of your elder daughter.' I think father had concerted with the Maharaja ; he turned a deaf ear to my entreaties, and angrily said, 'Wretch ! you have at once bidden adieu to shame ?'

With the view of saving me, Urmila interceded strongly with the Maharaja. He replied,

'I can forgive the thief, if he consent to marry Bimala.'

I becalmed myself, when I understood the intention of the Maharaja. My lord got wroth at the proposal and said,

'I shall ever remain a captive, I shall lay down my life, but I shall never marry a *sudra* girl. How can you, being a Hindu, make such a request?'

'When I could' replied the Maharaja 'give my sister in marriage to the Prince, Selim, what wonder that I shall request you to marry the daughter of a Brahmin?'

But my lord did not consent. He said 'Maharaj, what is done, is done Do you kindly release me. I shall never name Bimala more.'

'What then is done by you to expiate your guilt?' replied the Maharaja. 'You will leave Bimala, and others will spurn her as a fallen woman!'

Still he held out. At length when the sufferings of durance 'vile' were no longer bearable, he half consented, and said, "If Bimala consent to live as a maid-servant, if she never in her life put me in mind of this marriage, if she never give herself out for my wedded wife, I can marry a *Sudri*,—else not."

With the greatest alacrity, I consented to do all this. I did not set a pin's fee on wealth and name, I was only mad for my lord. Both my father and the Maharaja consented; I came to my husband's roof in the guise of a maid-servant.

My husband had married me under compulsion. Who ever cherishes his wife with love, having married under such circumstances? I became the eye-sore of my husband after our marriage, and his former love at once vanished. He constantly took me to task, remembering the indignity he suffered from Man Singha. His scolding I accounted as love. In this way passed some time, but what's the use of mentioning all that? I have done with

narrating my personal history; no more. In time I regained the affections of my husband; but he still maintained a feeling of bitter animosity against Abnir's lord. It was the will of Fate, else why would all this take place? But I have done. It is not only to fulfil my promise that I have written you. Many think that I lived at the house of the chief of Garmandaran, relinquishing my honor. When I am no more, you will wipe out that stain from my reputation. This has actuated me to write you.

In this letter I have only narrated what concerned myself; I have not once mentioned her for whom you are anxious. Think that her name has vanished from the face of the earth. Pray, forget that such a one as Tilottama ever breathed on earth."

Having read the letter through, Osman said, "Mother you have saved my life. I will requite you."

"Alas! what can you do for me now?" said Bimala with a sigh. "What can you do for me? Still one thing—."

"I will do that," said Osman. Bimala's eyes sparkled; she said, "Osman, what do you say? Why do you decieve this burnt heart?"

Osman took out a ring from his finger and said,

"Take this ring. Nothing can be done in a day or two. Katlu Khan's birth-day is about to come; there will be joy and revelry that day. The guards will be engrossed in pleasure. I will deliver you that night. Do you come to the gate of the inner apartment at midnight; there if any one shows you another ring like this, come out with him. I hope you will escape without obstruction. But all depends upon His will."

"God bless you," exclaimed Bimala. "What more shall I say?"

Her utterance was choked ; she could say no more.

She was about to depart after offering him her benediction, when he said,

"I will warn you of one thing. Come alone. If you take another with you, your object will fail; nay, it may bring on danger."

Bimala understood that Osman was prohibiting her to take Tilottama. She thought within herself, "Well, if we can't come both, Tilottama alone will come." She then took leave of Osman.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECOVERY.

Time flies. Do whatever you will, Time will fly and not remain still. Whatever condition you may be in, Time will fly and not stop its career. Way-farer! are you being roughly handled by the storm and rain? Are the clouds roaring loud and deep over your head? Are the winds blowing wildly? Are you dripping in rain? Is your helpless body being mercilessly pelted by hail-stones? Don't you find a shelter for your head? A little patience, friend ; this day will go away and not stand still. Wait a bit, this ugly day will pass away, 'there's a gude time coming' ; the sun will rise again. Wait for the morrow,

Whose days do not go away? Whose days stand still to perpetuate his misery? Brother! why then weep? Whose days sit down to perpetuate his happiness? Why then swagger?

Whose days do not go? Tilottama is rolling in the dust, yet the days are going away.

Revenge has made Bimala's bosom its home, and with its tooth has spread venom into every fibre of it. A moment of suffering from its sting is insupportable, how many moments go to make up a day! Still have her days not gone away?

The victorious Katlu Khan is lying in the lap of luxury. His days are passing happily, but still they are passing away and are not stationery.

Jagat Singha is lying on a sick-bed. Who does not know what a lazy foot Time has with sick people? But still the days have gone away.

Yes, the days *have* gone away. By degrees, Jagat Singha began to recover. Having escaped the jaws of death, the Prince rallied daily. First his bodily uneasiness disappeared, then his appetite returned, next his strength returned, and with it brought anxiety.

His first thought was—"Where is Tilottama?" The more he rallied, the more he asked all that came in his way concerning Tilottama, in a disconsolate temper of mind; but none returned any satisfactory answer. Aesha did not know—Osman did not say—the servants and maids either did not know or did not say, having been forbidden. It was a bed of thorns with the Prince.

His second thought referred to his future. "What is to come?" Who could return a ready answer to this question?

The Prince saw that he was a captive. Through the kindness of Osman and Aesha, he was living in a well furnished and perfumed chamber instead of in a prison; he was tended by servants and maids; he had everything ready before asking; Aesha was tending him with more than a sister's care. Still a person mounted guard at the door; he felt like a bird in a golden cage, fed with sweet drinks. When should he get free? Where was the likelihood of his getting free at all? Where were his troops then? How did they fare, deprived of their officer?

His next thought respected Aesha. "How has this fascinating and bewitching creature,—how has this image of benevolence and goodness descended upon this clay world of ours!"

Jagat Singha saw that Aesha knew no rest,—no fatigue,—no neglect. She was ceaseless in her attentions. So long as the Prince's illness continued, he daily saw her coming in the morning, like the 'sun new risen', with a graceful pace, holding a nose-gay in her hand; daily he saw her remaining in the room even till the usual hour of bathing and breakfast had gone by; daily he saw her returning soon, after performing those necessary actions, to be engaged in tending him so long as the Begam did not send her maid, (with the exception of short interruptions from urgent business.)

What man has not lain on a sick-bed? But if ever it has fallen to the lot of any to have been tended by a radiant girl at his head, and to have been fanned by her lily hands,—he alone can say that disease is not altogether unpleasant.

Reader! wish you to form a lively image of Jagat Singha's situation? Well then, lie down (in imagination) on his sick-bed, your entire body suffering from severe pain. Fancy yourself

a captive among foes; next fancy a richly furnished, deliciously cool and perfumed chamber. Fix your gaze at the door; suddenly your countenance shows expressions of joy; yonder comes the person who under this hostile roof looks on you as a brother; the person is moreover a woman—a youthful woman—a very full-blown lotus. Lying at length, you are looking at her steadily. Look what a grace is seated on that form—just tending to be tall, with all the members perfectly symmetrical—a very goddess with her divine perfections—a very queen by virtue of Nature's sanctifying chrism. Look, how graceful is her step. Have you heard of the elephant's gait? What is that? You talk of the motion of the swan? Mark the girl's step. The sounding instrument keeps measure in music; your heart keeps time to the music of her steps. See the bouquet in her hand. Do you see the flowers have lost their hue before the superior brightness of her hands? Do you see that the golden chain has grown dim before the brightness of her throat? Ah! what's this? Why have your eyes forgotten to twinkle? Do you see the graceful manner of her neck? Do you see how happily the dark ringlets have fallen over her alabaster neck? Do you see how sweetly her pendants are waving? Have you marked the gentle inclination of her head? That is owing only to her slight tallness. Why are you looking so steadfastly? What will Aesha think of you?

So long as the illness of Jagat Singha required her services, Aesha was every day ceaselessly engaged in tending him. As the Prince grew better and better, the visits of Aesha became rarer and rarer; and when he was perfectly cured, she seldom came to him, only visiting him once or twice at long intervals, and

when she came, she almost always came attended by Osman. As in winter the sun imperceptibly glides away from the body of a shivering person, as it gets late, even so did Aesha disappear from Jagat Singha as he recovered.

One evening the Prince stood at the window, looking beyond the fort. Men intent on business or pleasure were streaming to their respective destinations. Sadly the Prince fell to comparing his lot with theirs. At one place some people had formed themselves into a ring round some person or thing. The Prince's glance fell that way. He gathered that the men were engaged in some amusement; and that they were attentively listening to something. What the person or the object in the middle was like, the Prince could not see. He felt rather curious. After sometime, several of the audience went away; and his curiosity was satisfied. He saw a man was treating the people to some reading from a few leaves, which resembled a *puti*.* The person of the reciter rather awakened his curiosity. He might pass either for a man, or for a middle-sized palm tree 'scathed by heaven's fire,' and shorn of its leaves. He was as tall and as broad; but the palm is never loaded with so huge a proboscis of a nose. His manner was of a piece with his shape. The Prince fell to studying most heedfully the various gesticulations of the hand, the head and the proboscis with which the reciter accompanied his reading. Now Osman entered.

When they had saluted each other, Osman asked,

"Pray, Sir, what are you looking at so intently at the window?"

"Something like a piece of wood," replied the Prince. "You can see it, Sir, if you like."

* A Ms. of palm-leaves.

"Hav'nt you seen him before, Prince?" asked Osman after seeing the man.

"No," replied the Prince.

"He is one of your Brahmins, Sir," said Osman. "His conversation is quite elegant. I saw him at Garmandaran."

The Prince grew anxious. He was at Garmandaran? Couldn't he then tell anything of Tilottama?

"What's his name, Sir, ?" asked he in agitation.

Osman thought for a while, and said, "His name is rather hard to tell; it can't be so easily recalled to mind. *Ganapat?* No, *Ganapati?*—*Gajapat?* No, *Gajapati?* What more?"

"*Gajapati?*—It's not a Bengali name; yet I see the man is a native of this country."

"Right! He is a Bengali; a Bhattacharjya. He has got some title. *Elem—elem*—what next?"

"O no, Sir, Bengali titles never take in the word *elem.* The Bengali for *elem* is *vidya**. He might be a *Vidyabhusan* or a *Vidyabagish.*"

"Yes, yes, *vidya* and something more. Stay—what do they call an elephant in Bengali?"

"*Hasti.*"

"What more?"

"*Kari, danti, varana, naga, gaja*—"

"Ah! here it is; his name is Gajapati Vidyadiggaja."

"Viddyadiggaja! a rare title as I live! Nothing could match the title except the name. I feel curious to talk with the man."

Osman Khan had heard a wee bit of Gajapati's conversation; and saw no harm to any talk the Prince might hold with him.

* Learning.

"No harm," replied he.

They thereupon went into the next room and had Gajapati called in by a servant.

CHAPTER IX.

DIGGAJA'S TIDINGS.

When Gajapati Vidyadiggaja was ushered in by the servant, the Prince asked, "Are you a Brahmin, Sir?"

Diggaja replied with a wave of the hand,

"यावत् मेरौ स्थिता देवा यावत् गङ्गा महीतले,
असारे खलु संसारे, सारं श्वशुर मन्दिरं।"

[So long as the gods choose to inhabit the Himalaya, so long as the Ganges waters this sublunary sphere, in this unreal world, verily the only reality is the father-in-law's house.]

Jagat Singha suppressed his rising laughter and bowed down his head. Gajapati uttered the benediction, "May *Khoda Khan** bless the noble Babu!"

* This is an extremely ludicrous expression, showing the ignorance of Diggaja, who had been recently converted to Mahommedanism. The word *Khan*, which is a Mahomedan title, is never used in conjunction with *Khoda* (God).

"I am not a *Musalman*, Sir," said the Prince. "I am a Hindu."

"The rogue!" thought Diggaja. "He is certainly a Yavan; he is only trying to humbug me. He has some motive for this, else why should he call me in? Noble Khan* Babu," said he sadly in alarm, "I know you, Sir. I live upon your bread; do not ill treat me, I pray you; I am your bond-slave, Sir."

Jagat Singha perceived the hitch.

"You are a Brahmin, Sir," said he, "and I am a Rajput. This language to me is therefore not befitting. Your name is Gajapati Vidyadiggaja?"

"Ha! look there!" thought Diggaja. "The fellow wants my name! God knows what a scrape he will bring me into! Have mercy upon me, noble Shaik," exclaimed he with joined hands. "Have mercy, I am a poor man, Sir. On my knees I beseech you."

From the Brahmin's extremity of fright, Jagat Singha saw it was impossible to make him answer his purpose by any direct means. Accordingly with the view of diverting his attention, he said,

"What *puti* have you got in your hand?"

"A work on *Manikpir*, so please you, Sir."

"You a Brahmin and carry a work on *Manikpir*?"

"Hem! hem! I was a Brahmin once, but not now."

The Prince was at once astonished and vexed.

"What say you? Didn't you live at Garmandaran?"

"Death and damnation O!" thought Diggaja. "He has even discovered that I lived at Virendra Singha's castle! He will deal with me even as they have done with Virendra Singha." Here the Brahmin burst into tears.

* This is another ludicrous conjunction, the word Khan being joined to the word Babu applied to Bengalis as an honorific epithet.

"Have mercy, noble Khan!" cried out Diggaja, rubbing his hands with might and main. "Do not belabour me, I beseech you; I am your slave."

"Are you in your senses?"

"Yes, your honor! I am your slave, Sir; I am your own, Sir!"

"No fear, man," said Jagat Singha, with the view of calming the Brahmin. "Pray, entertain us with a reading from your book."

The Brahmin fell to reading the *puti* in a sing-song way, his eyes still bedewed with tears. His tone was as much a borrower from crying as from sing-song. So sings a little boy who has just been pulled by the ear by the opera master.

After he had read for sometime, the Prince asked,

"Being a Brahmin, why were you reading a book on Manikpir?"

"I am a convert now," answered the Brahmin, stopping his sing song.

"How's that?" asked the Prince.

"When the Musalman Babus entered the fort," said Gajapati "they said to me, 'Come, Brahmin, we'll spoil your caste'; and thereupon they dragged me away, and forced me to eat the fowl *palo*."*

"What is *palo*?"

"The *atapa*† rice boiled in clarified butter."

The Prince understood what was meant.

"Go on"—said he.

"Then they made me read *Kalmi*,"‡ said Diggaja.

* Diggaja here ludicrously confounds *polao*—a rich Mehommedan dish—with *palo*—a kind of gruel for sick people.

† *Atapa* means sunshine; *atapa* rice is rice dried in the sun.

‡ *Kalma* is a Mehommedan religious work. *Diggaja* calls it *Kalmi*—the name, familiar in Bengali households, of a salad!

"*Kalma*; well then?"

"Then they said, 'You have become a Musalman.' Since then I am a Musalman."

"What of the other inmates?" here enquired the Prince.

"All the other Brahmins have fared like me."

The Prince fixed his eyes on Osman. Understanding his silent rebuke, Osman said,

"And where's the harm in it, Prince? We consider Mahommedanism as the only true faith; and consider it no sin but a virtue to spread it by any means."

"Noble Vidyadiggaja—"said the Prince without replying to Osman.

"Now, Shaikh Diggaja, if you please."

"Very well; noble Shaikh, know you anything of any other inmates of the castle?"

Osman grew anxious, understanding the motive of the Prince.

"Besides, Abhiramswami has escaped," said Diggaja.

The Prince saw that he must (if he should learn anything) speak directly.

"What has become of Virendra Singha?" asked he.

"The Nabab has beheaded him," replied the Brahmin.

The Prince's face reddened.

"What does he say?" he asked Osman. "Is the Brahmin telling a fib?"

"After trying him," replied Osman seriously, "the Nabab has executed him as a rebel."

The Prince's eyes flashed fire.

"May I take the liberty, Sir, to ask one thing more?" he asked Osman. "Was it done with your consent?"

"No; it was against my advice," replied Osman.

The Prince paused for a long while. Taking the opportunity, Osman said to Diggaja,

"You may go now."

Diggaja rose and was about to go away, when the Prince prevented him by catching hold of his hand.

"One word more," said he. "Where is Bimala?"

The Brahmin heaved a sigh; he also cried a little.

"Bimala is now the concubine of the Nabab," said he.

The Prince cast at Osman a glance like the lightning. "Is this also true?" asked he.

"What have you to do here any more?" said Osman to the person, without replying to the Prince. "Go away."

The Prince grasped his hand firmly; so that the Brahmin could not choose but stay.

"Wait a moment longer," said he. "One word more and I have done." Here his red eyes began to flash with living flame. "One word more; Tilottama?"

"Tilottama," replied the Brahmin, "also is now the Nabab's concubine. They are living in peace in the midst of every comfort."

The Prince violently pushed away the Brahmin's hand; the man luckily escaped going head over heels.

Osman was ashamed; he said in a soft tone,

"I am an officer merely."

"You are the Devil's officer," replied the Prince.

CHAPTER X.



SWEET IMAGE, AWAY!

It is needless to say that Jagat Singha could not sleep a wink that night. His bed was full of scorpions; his heart burnt in anguish and pain. That Tilottama whose death would before have rendered his existence insupportable—that the same Tilottama still lived,—this was the only thing which he regretted.

How so? That Tilottama still lived! That tender flower, that angelical sweetness, that soft splendour, that frame which rises before Jagat Singha's vision whichever way he turns his gaze, shall the jaws of the grave close over such a frame! This earth—this spacious earth, shall it not contain a vestige of that frame? O heavy thought! O insupportable hour! Jagat Singha's eyes

"Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum———————"

Anon the thought of the hellish Katlu Khan's pleasure chamber flashes upon his imagination; he sees that tender frame on the lap of the villain, and again his heart burns like a volcano,

That Tilottama whose image has been enshrined in his heart of hearts—that Tilottama is now an inmate of the Pathan's—aye,—that very Tilottama is now the concubine of Katlu Khan!

Can a Rajpoot pay his devotions to such an image any more? Is a Rajput worthy of his race who hesitates with his own hands to tear that image from his mind for ever?

That image has rooted itself deep in the mind of Jagat Singha; and to uproot it is to rend the heart itself. Ah! how shall he banish that lovely image for ever? Is it possible? So long as "memory holds a seat in his distracted globe," so long as flesh and blood remain, so long will that image lord it over his heart and soul.

Not to speak of his mental quiet, these distracted thoughts were fast depriving the Prince of his reason; his memory began to fail. When the night was about to go away, the Prince still sat up supporting his head upon his hands; his brain was reeling; he had lost all power of thinking.

His body ached for having sat long in the same posture; his violent mental agitation had spread fever heat all over his body. He came up to the window.

The cool summer breeze touched his forehead. There was darkness all round; a thin cloud had spread itself in the sky; the stars were not visible; only here and there a mild-gleaming star peeped out from behind a fleeting cloud. The trees at a distance had blended themselves into one another's being in the dark, and stood under the sky like a wall of darkness; the trees close by were glittering with crowns of glow-worms, which shone like so many diamonds. In a tank in front, the image of the trees and the sky appeared indistinct in darkness.

The night breeze which had stolen its coolness from the clouds, somewhat allayed the bodily heat of Jagat Singha. He remained at the window and stood placing his hand over his head. He

had become exhausted through prolonged mental agitation, and from want of sleep. The contact of the grateful breeze made him desist a little from thinking, and somewhat diverted his thoughts. The dagger which had hitherto been piercing his heart was being replaced by the less poignant dagger of despair. The pain is in forsaking hope; when despair has once established itself in the mind, the pain is not so much; it is the blow which is attended with very great pain,—not so the wound, which though lasting, is not so painful. Jagat Singha was now suffering the lesser pain of despair. He looked at the dark, starless appearance of the heavens, and then with tearful eyes looked at the dark star-less appearance of his own heart. The past now gently began to start into life at the touch of remembrance; childhood, youth with its delights, all came before his view; he was lost in his reflections; by and bye he became still more absorbed; by and bye his body began to cool down; he was fast growing insensible from fatigue. He felt sleepy, as he kept hold of the window. In his sleep the Prince dreamed a dream. It was of a very painful and agitating nature. He frowned in sleep; his face showed expressions of agony; his lips quivered; perspiration stood out on his forehead; his fists clenched fast.

He awaked with a start; he began to pace the room hurriedly; it is difficult to say how long he suffered in this way.

When the walls of the room were laughing in the morning sun, Jagat Singha was sleeping, stretched at length on the ground, without a bed, without a pillow.

Osman came and awakened him. When he rose, Osman saluted and handed him a letter. The Prince took it, and without saying anything, fixed his gaze on Osman. The latter

understood that the Prince's mind was wandering. Thinking the time, therefore, as unsuitable for any talk on business, he said,

"Prince, I don't feel curious to know the reason of your lowly bed—not I. I had promised the writer of this note to deliver it to you. The reason which made me so long withhold it from you, exists no longer, you have learnt it all, Sir. I leave the letter with you; read it at your leisure. I'll call again in the evening. If you should wish to send a reply, I will have it conveyed to the writer."

Saying this, Osman left the letter with the Prince, and went away.

On being restored to his senses when left alone, he began to read Bimala's letter. After having read it from beginning to end, he prepared a fire and cast the note into it. He kept his gaze fixed at it, so long as it burnt; when it was completely consumed, he said to himself,

"I have succeeded in destroying the remembrancer, by committing it to the flames; memory too is burning in anguish, but why is it not reduced to ashes?"

He then finished his daily morning duties. After finishing his devotions, he reverentially bowed down his head to his guardian deity, and then clasping his hands and looking upwards, said,

"Father! forsake not Thy servant. I will act as becomes a Kshatriya; I only ask Thy blessing. I will banish from my mind the concubine of the casteless wretch; should the effort cost me my life, I shall have Thee in the next world. I have done what man can do, I will do what man can. O! Searcher of hearts! look thou into the very recesses of my soul and see whether I any more long for Tilottama, any more wish to see her;

Only fell remembrance is torturing me incessantly. I have resigned the desire, shall I never be able to get rid of the memory? Father! have mercy upon me! or cruel remembrance will undo me quite."

The image is banished.

Tilottama! what are you dreaming of, girl, lying on the ground? The sole star at which you had been gazing amidst dismal gloom, will no more impart its light to you; the plank to which you had clung for life in this violent tempest, has slipped from your hold; the raft on which you had embarked your fortunes for crossing the ocean, has gone to the bottom!

CHAPTER XI.

CHANGING THE ROOM.

According to his word, Osman came in the evening and said,

"Do you wish to send a reply, Prince?"

The Prince had written a reply, which he now handed to Osman.

Osman took it.

"Please excuse me, Sir," said he; "but we make it a point never to allow one inmate of the fort to send any note to another, unless we first satisfy ourselves as to its contents."

"It is needless to say it," replied the Prince rather sadly. "You can read the letter, Sir, and then send it, if you like."

Osman opened and read the letter. It contained simply the following lines :—

"Ill-fated woman! I will not forget your request. But if you really loved your husband, you must follow him, and thereby wipe out the stain that has attached itself to your name.

Jagat Singha."

"Prince!" said Osman after reading the note, "you are very cruel."

"Certainly not more than the Pathan, Sir," replied the Prince drily.

Osman's countenance reddened ; he said rather harshly,

"The Pathans may not have behaved with you so very shabily, after all, Sir."

The Prince was at once angry and ashamed.

"No, Sir" said he ; "I speak not of myself. You have treated me very kindly, sure, and although you have taken me captive, you have given me my life ; you have effected the recovery from serious illness of one who had been destroying your forces. He who should be loaded with chains, and confined in a dungeon, lives in a perfumed chamber, through your kindness. What more can you do, Sir ? But what I say is this ; you are laying me under embarassing obligations ; I do not see the end which all this comfort points to. If I am a prisoner, send me to gaol, Sir ; release from this net of kindness ; but if I am not a prisoner, what's the use of keeping me in this golden cage, pray ?"

"Prince," replied Osman with composure, "why are you so impatient for evil? Evil requires no courting;—it comes of itself."

"The Rajputs," replied the Prince haughtily, "consider it no evil to exchange this flowery bed of yours for one of stone."

"It would not matter much" said Osman "if Misfortune had no greater terrors than the stone-bed."

The Prince eyed Osman keenly and said,

"When I have failed to chastise Katlu Khan, to me the executioner's axe is no evil."

"Take care, Sir," said Osman. "The Pathans are no babblers."

"General!" said the Prince with a scornful laugh, "if you have come to cow me, you will not succeed."

"No, Sir," replied Osman; "we know each other too well to waste words. I have come to you on some particular business."

"Let me hear it, Sir,"—said the Prince, rather surprised.

"The proposal which I make,—is made under the express orders of Katlu Khan. Please to bear this in mind."

Prince. "Very well."

Os. "The strife between the Rajputs and the Pathans is injuring both parties."

Prince. "Our object is to make root and branch work of the Pathans."

"True" replied Osman; "but Sir, consider the chance of destroying us without at the same time undergoing destruction yourselves. You, for one, can testify whether the captors of Garmandaran are so utterly weak."

A slight smile appeared on the lips of Jagat Singha.

"I grant them skill."

"Whatever it be," Osman went on; "it's not my object to praise self. It will never be easy for the Pathans to live in Orissa, if they are at daggers-drawn with the Emperor. But, depend upon it, Sir, he will never succeed in subjecting them. Don't tax me with national vanity; you are well conversant with political matters. Consider what a long way off Orissa is from Delhi. Suppose that the Emperor succeeds in bringing the Pathans under his yoke through the arms of Man Singha; how long will his banners float in Orissa? As soon as he turns his back, all the possessions of the Emperor in Orissa will slip from his grasp. Did not Akbar conquer the country before? But how long did it pay him tribute? And if he succeed in taking it again, it can but end in a like result. He may once more send his forces, and once more conquer the province; but again will the Pathans be free. The Pathans are not Bengalis, mind; they never have bowed down the knee to any one, they never will, so long as a single Pathan breathes. That is certain. Where then is the necessity of deluging the earth with the blood of Rajpoots and Pathans?"

"And what would you propose, Sir?" asked Jagat Singha.

"*I* propose nothing" said Osman; "but my master proposes peace."

Jagat. "And what kind of peace?"

Os. "Let both of us concede a little. The Nabab Katlu Khan is ready to relinquish what he has possessed himself of in Bengal; let Akbar waive his claims to Orissa, and, withdrawing his troops, desist from any future warfare. He is not a whit the loser by this bargain; the Pathans indeed might,

to a certain extent, be considered as losers. We are parting with that which we have made ourselves masters of by our own exertions, Akbar is only parting with what he could not make his own."

"Good and well" replied the Prince. "But why do you speak this to me? The man to make peace and war is Maharaja Man Singha; you should send an envoy to him."

"We did so, good Prince," returned Osman. "Unfortunately for us some body had reported to him that the Pathans have taken your Highness' life. Through grief and anger at this report, the Maharaj would listen to no proposal of peace. He did not believe in the assurances of our envoy. But if you, Sir, personally propose the terms to him, he may consent."

The Prince fixed his look on Osman and said,

"Be plain, Sir, I beseech you. When the Maharaja may believe it at sight of my handwriting, why do you wish me to go personally?"

Os. "The thing is this. The Maharaja is not very well informed of our strength; you will be able to enlighten him on that point; and we hope a good deal from your kind intercession. A letter cannot do as much. One of the first results of the peace will be your Highness' release; the Nabab has accordingly thought that you would try to bring about this treaty."

Prince. "I do not refuse to go to my father."

Os. "I am glad of it, Sir; but I must provide one thing. If you don't succeed in concluding the peace we offer, will you kindly pledge us your word to come back into the fort."

Prince. "And how can you be sure that I shall return if I promise?"

"Yes, Sir, I am sure" replied Osman with a smile. "That a Rajput is true to his word is a well-known fact."

"Very well, Sir," said the Prince complacently; "I engage to come back alone into the fort, soon after seeing my father."

Os. "Kindly promise one thing more and you oblige us completely. Promise that you will bring forward the terms offered by us, when you see the Maharaja."

"Worthy general" replied the Prince, "excuse me, Sir, I cannot promise this. The Emperor has appointed us to subjugate the Pathans; and to subjugate them is our only duty; he has not appointed us to conclude peace, and peace we shall never conclude. Nor will I ever propose such a thing."

Osman's face showed expressions both of satisfaction and regret.

"Prince," said he, "you have replied like a Rajput, but consider there is no other way of your getting free."

Prince. "And what's my freedom to the Emperor, pray? The Rajput race has many a Prince like me."

"Prince," said Osman with sorrowful earnestness; "take my advice, Sir; resign your present purpose."

Prince. "And why so, ?"

Os. "To be plain, it is only in the hope of inducing you to bring about his end that the great Nabab has, up to this time, shown you such consideration. If you set your face against his object, he will be very severe upon you, Sir."

Prince. "On that key again? Did I not a moment before ask you to take me to prison?"

Os. "Young Prince! it would be lucky indeed for you if that only satisfied the Nabab."

The Prince frowned.

"If it doesn't, I' will increase Virendra Singha's bloody torrent." His eyes flashed fire.

"I go then"—replied Osman. "I have done my duty. You will learn Katlu Khan's intention by some messenger."

A messenger came after a while. He was dressed like a soldier; he was of a rank above that of the foot-soldier. He had with him four armed foot-soldiers.

"What's your message?"—asked the Prince.

"You will have to change your quarters, Sir," said the man.

"I am ready, Sir, proceed," said the Prince and followed him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SINGULAR ORNAMENT.

A great festivity was come—the celebration of Katlu Khan's anniversary. Dancing and drinking, mirth and frolic, feasting and alms-giving filled the day. The night was even more jovial. It was just past sunset. The fort was a-blaze with light. Every creek and corner was filled with officers, soldiers, courtiers, servants, beggars, drunkards, actors, actresses, dancers, dancing-girls, musicians, jugglers, fruiterers, vendors of perfumes, betel sellers, vendors of various kinds of food, of various products of art, &c., &c. Wherever you went, you came upon illumination, music, fragrant waters, betels, flowers, jugglery and prostitutes. It was partly the same with the inner apartments.

The Nabab's seraglio was comparatively calm, but comparatively more gay. Every chamber was mildly lighted with fragrant silver and crystal lamps; there were fragrant flowers on the flower stands, over the pillars, and on the beds, the cushions and the persons of the inmates. The air was sick with the smell of the rose. No end of maids, clad in gold brocade, or in blue, yellow, black, or pale red *chin* cloth, were passing and repassing, their golden ornaments glittering in the light. Their fair mistresses sat each in her chamber, and all care and attention were engaged in making their toilette. That day, the Nabab would make merry with every one in his pleasure-house; there would be music and dancing; every one would that night obtain her desire. Some fair one (intending to secure a situation for her brother) was lustily applying the comb to her hair; another with the view of increasing the number of her maids had brought her curled locks down to her very breast; a third intended to secure some property in the shape of dower on behalf of her new-born son, and in order to make her neck blush, had rubbed it until blood had actually began to flow. Another woman envying a set of ornaments the Nabab had recently given to a favored mistress, was painting the under-lids of her eyes with *kajjala* through their whole lengths. A maid-servant in donning the cloth on the person of her gentle mistress, unwarily pressed her *peshwaj** with her feet; and the gentle fair one administered her a goodly slap on her cheek. By the inexorable virtue of age, the hairs of some dame had grown rather thin, and a quantity came out with the comb which the maid had been applying to them. Seeing this, her mistress began to cry, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

* A piece of dress resembling the gown.

Like the land-lotus in the grove, like the peacock among birds, a certain fair one, after having finished her toilette, was roving from room to room. One could go anywhere that night. Nature had made the woman the receptacle of her sweets; Katlu Khan had given her every member its appropriate ornament; yet her face did not show any marks of pride either for her beauty or for her ornaments. She knew no mirth, no laugh. Her face was grave—calm—her eyes showed the fire burning within.

After roving here and there, Bimala entered a handsome chamber. She fastened the door. On this festive occasion, a solitary lamp only cast its pale beams around. On the further side stood a couch on which lay some one covered from head to foot with a blanket. Bimala came up to the side of the person and said faintly,

"I am come."

The person on the bed started and withdrew the cover from off her face.

Having recognised Bimala, she put away the blanket and sat up; but spoke nothing.

"Tilottama," said Bimala again, "I am come."

Still Tilottama kept silent; she steadily gazed on Bimala's face. She was then no longer the bashful girl she had been. Alas! if you saw her then by the pale light, you would think her ten years older than she actually was. Her body was lean and emaciated; her countenance was pale; she wore a short, unclean cloth; her hair was covered with dust; there was not a single ornament on her person, only the traces of her former ornaments remained.

"I told that I would come" again Bimala said, "and have done so. Why don't you speak?"

"What I had to say" replied Tilottama, "I have said. What more shall I say?"

Bimala perceived from Tilottama's voice that she was weeping. Bimala laid her hand on Tilottama's head, and raised her face; it was bedewed with tears; Bimala felt the flowing end of Tilottama's cloth, and found it thoroughly wet. She then touched the pillow on which the latter had reposed her head, and also found it wet.

"How long can you stand this constant weeping?" said Bimala.

"And wherefore should I stand it?" said Tilottama eagerly. "The only regret is that I have stood it so long."

Bimala became silent and began to weep.

"But what's to be done for to-night?" asked Bimala with a deep sigh, after a pause.

Tilottama eyed Bimala's ornaments with displeasure.

"What is the need of thinking of that?" said she.

"My child," replied Bimala; "don't you slight me. You don't yet know Katlu Khan well. Partly for want of leisure, and partly to allow our grief to subside, the villain has spared us so long. I have ere this told you, to-day ends our freedom. I don't know what danger will befall us, should he miss us at the dancing saloon."

"What more danger can possibly befall us?"—said Tilottama.

"Tilottama," said Bimala rather calmly, "why do you at once despair? Still we have life—still we have innocence. So long as we have life—so long we will keep our innocence intact."

"Why then, mother?" Tilottama then said, "Fling off those ornaments; they are an eye-sore to me."

"Child"—said Bimala with a smile, "don't chide me without seeing *all* my ornaments."

Saying this, she drew out from her waist a sharp dagger, which she had hidden in her dress. It flashed like lightning on meeting the glare.

"Where have you procured it? Eh?" asked Tilottama, starting and looking blank.

"Havn't you seen," said Bimala, "a new maid-servant who came yesterday into the inner apartment?"

Til. "Yes, I have,—it is Ashmani."

"I have brorght it in through Ashmani, from Abhiram-swami."

Tilottama was surprised; her heart trembled.

After a while, Bimala asked, "Will you not change this dress to-night?"

"No," replied Tilottama.

"Neither will you go to the dancing and music?"

Til. "No."

Bi. "Still you will not be let alone."

Tilottama began to weep.

"Be calm and listen," said Bimala. "I have found means for your escape."

Tilottama eagerly looked at Bimala's face. The latter handed to her the ring given by Osman.

"Keep it with you," said she; "don't go to the merry-making. It will not end before midnight. I shall up to that time be able to keep the Pathan engaged. He knows that I am your step-mother; and I will make him restrain his desire to see you till the dance and music is over, under the pretext that you can't come

in my presence. At midnight, go to the gate of the inner apartment; there a person will show you another ring like this; go with him without hesitation. He will take you wherever you should like to go. Tell him to take you to Abhiramswami's cottage."

Tilottama was astonished. Either from amazement or from excess of joy, she could not speak for a while.

"What's this ?" said she. "Who has given you this ring ?"

"That's a long story to tell,"—said Bimala. "I will tell it to you at leisure. Now do without hesitation as I have told you."

"And what of yourself?" asked Tilottama. "How will you go out ?"

"Don't be uneasy on that account," said Bimala. "I will by some other means go out and meet you to-morrow morning."

She thus silenced Tilottama. The latter could not understand that she closed her own way in providing deliverance for Tilottama.

For many a day, Tilottama's face had not expressed joy. She now looked quite cheerful at this joyful intelligence.

This filled Bimala with delight.

"Then I go now," said she with tearful eyes and a choked utterance.

"I see," said Tilottama hesitatingly, "you know every thing that has taken place within the fort. Will you tell me (before you go) how and where our friends and acquaintances are ?"

Bimala saw that even in this imminent danger the remembrance of Jagat Singha was lively in Tilottama's mind. Bimala had received Jagat Singha's cruel note, in which he did not mention the very name of Tilottama. To tell this to her would but add to the misery of a heart already bending beneath the weight of

its sorrow. Therefore without alluding to that subject, Bimala said,

"Jagat Singha is in the fort. He is in good health."

Tilottama remained silent.

Bimala kissed her and went out, wiping her eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRESENTING THE RING.

When Bimala had gone out, seated alone in her chamber, Tilottama began to indulge in melancholy as well as cheerful reflections. That a way was now opened for her speedy deliverence from the clutches of the fiend, almost engrossed her thoughts—the thought that Bimala loved her more than life, that she owed her expected deliverence to Bimala, came repeatedly before her mind and increased her delight. Then she thought, "And where shall I direct my steps when I go out? Alas! where is my father's roof now." Anon the tears trickled down her cheeks. When other anxieties had been stifled, another troubled her mind: "The Prince then is safe. But where is he? How is he? Is he too a captive?" The thought brought tears to her eyes "Lack-a-day! the Prince is a captive for me. Shall I be able to requite him by laying down my life at his feet? Ah! what shall I do for him?" Again thought she, "Is he in prison? What is the prison like? Can none go there? What can he be thinking now, sitting in his prison? Is he

remembering such a one as Tilottama? Oh yes! Am I not the cause of his present distress? I don't know what lots of names he is calling me." Again thought she, "And how so? Why should I think so? Does he know how to call any one names? No, no, that can't be. But the fear is, he may have forgotten me; or banished me from his thoughts for being an inmate of the Yavan." "No, no," she went on, "why will he do so? I am a mere captive in the fortress even as he is. Why then will he despise me? If he do so, in spite of this, I will take hold of his feet and explain it to him. Will he not be satisfied? By all means, he will. If he will not, I will die before him. Formerly they used to go through the fiery ordeal; it is not so now in this *Kali** age. Never mind, what if I throw myself before him in the fire?" "Ah! when shall I see him?" she continued; "how shall he get free? What purpose is served by my deliverance? Wherefrom has my step-mother procured this ring? Could this serve to deliver him? What if I send this ring to him? Who will come to take me out? Cannot any means be found through him? But how shall I ask him about it? Shall I not be able to see the Prince once more?" She again thought, "Ah! how shall I ask for an interview with him? How open my lips to him, in his presence? By what words shall I relieve this wretched heart?"

Tilottama thought incessantly.

A maid-servant entered. Tilottama asked her,

"What o'clock is it?"

"'Tis struck twelve," was the answer.

* Hindu chronologers divide the ages of the world into four periods, the *Kali juga* being the last.

Tilottama waited for the disappearance of the menial. When she had gone out after doing what she came for, Tilottama took the ring and issued from the room. She then became subject to apprehensions ; her feet trembled ; her heart quaked ; her face grew blank ; she advanced one pace and receded another. By degrees, summoning courage, she reached so far as the gate of the inner apartment. The inmates, the eunuchs, the negro-slaves,—all were knee-deep in merriment ; nobody saw her ; and if any did, he did not care to notice her. But it seemed to Tilottama as if she was marked by every one. She however got courage to proceed to the gate. There the guards who had been making merry over 'potations pottle-deep,' were either asleep, or awake but insensible, or half insensible : no body marked her. One person only was standing at the gate ; he too was dressed like a guard. On seeing Tilottama, he said,

"Have you got a ring, madam?"

In a flurry, Tilottama presented the ring given by Bimala. The man carefully examined it and showed her another on his finger.

"Come with me, madam, no fear," said he.

Tilottama followed him in agitation. The guards in the other parts of the fort were as lax as those who guarded the inner apartment. More particularly, as the gates were thrown open that night to all, no one said any thing to the pair. The guard crossed many a threshold, many a room, many a yard, and at last reached the main gate of the fortress. He then said,

"Where would you go?"

Tilottama could not bring to mind the instruction of Bimala ; she first remembered Jagat Singha. She burned to say, "take

me to the Prince;" but shame, her former enemy, prevented her, and the words stuck in her throat. The guard again asked, "Where shall I take you?"

Tilottama could say nothing, she was almost out of herself; her heart trembled she knew not why; her eyes failed to see; her ears to hear; she knew not what escaped her lips; a faint sound like *Jagat Singha* entered the guard's ear.

"Jagat Singha is in prison now," said he; "no one can go there; but I have been ordered to take you wherever you should like to go. Come along, madam."

The guard re-entered the fort. Unconscious of what she was about or where she was going, she turned and followed her guide, like a puppet in pulling wires. The man found that the guards of the prison were not lax like those belonging to the other parts of the fort; here the men were watching in their posts.

"Where is the Prince?" asked the guide.

The man addressed pointed with his finger.

"Is the prisoner awake or asleep?" asked the guide to the guard of the prison. The man went up to the gate and returned.

"I have received the answer of the prisoner," said he. "He is awake."

"Please open the door to me," said the bearer of the ring; "this lady will go in to see the prisoner."

"How is that?" said the guard in surprise. "Don't you know there is no such order?"

The guide showed him the ring of Osman. The man bowed low, and opened the door.

The Prince was lying upon a common four-footed bed. On hearing the sound proceeding from the door, he looked at it curiously.

Tilottama neared the door but could approach no further. Her feet could not do their office; she took hold of the door, and stood there.

"What's this?" asked the bearer of the ring, seeing Tilottama pause. "Why do you stop here?"

Still Tilottama could not go.

"If you don't wish to enter in" said the man, "please return then; this is not the time to linger here."

Tilottama prepared to return; but she could not go that way either. What could she do? The guard was impatient. While vacillating thus, Tilottama unconsciously advanced a foot, and was in the room.

No sooner she saw the Prince, than she was again deprived of farther motion. She held by the wall and paused near the door, hanging down her head.

The Prince could not at first recognise Tilottama. He was surprised to see a woman. Seeing her pause near the wall, without approaching him, he was still more surprised. He rose from his bed and approached the door; he saw, and—he recognised.

For a moment their eyes met; anon Tilottama's were cast to the ground; her body slightly inclined forwards as if seeking the feet of the Prince.

He drew back a little, and anon Tilottama stood like one spell-bound and motionless as a statue; her bosom which but an instant before had bloomed like a lotus, became suddenly withered.

"Virendra Singha's daughter?" said the Prince.

Tilottama felt as if a dagger had entered her vitals. "Virendra Singha's daughter?" Is that the present address?

Has Jagat Singha forgotten the very name of Tilottama? Both remained silent for a while.

"Why here?" asked the Prince.

"Why here?" What a question! Tilottama's head became dizzy;—on all sides, the room, the bed, the lamp, the walls, all began to turn round; she supported herself by leaning her head against the wall.

For a long while, the Prince stood for reply; but who would reply? Seeing no chance of it, he said,

"You are suffering much. Return, and forget the past."

All doubts were now dispelled from Tilottama's mind; she fell down upon the ground, like a leaf torn from its parent tree.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRANCE.

Jagat Singha bent down and saw that Tilottama was quite senseless. He began to fan her with his cloth. Still not seeing any signs of sensibility, he called the guard.

Tilottama's guide came in.

"This woman has suddenly gone off in a trance," said Jagat Singha. "Who has come with her? Tell her to look to her."

"I alone have come," answered the guide.

"You!" exclaimed the Prince in surprise.

"None else," replied the guard.

"What's to be done then? Tell it to a maid-servant of the fortress."

The man was going away, when the Prince called him back and said,

"Look here! The matter shall take air, if you speak to any body about it; and who will leave the merry-making to help the woman?"

"That's too true," returned the guard. "And why will the guards allow any one to enter the prison? I don't dare bring any other into it."

"What shall I do then?" said the Prince. "There is only one means. Do you hastily convey the news to the Princess, through a maid-servant."

The guard hurried out to attend to the Prince's instructions. The Prince tended Tilottama so far as the circumstances of the case permitted. What were his thoughts then? Who can say? Did a tear stand in his eyes? Who can say?

The Prince was greatly embarrassed with Tilottama alone in the prison. If the tidings did not reach Aesha; if, again, she could not devise any means, what should it come to?

By degrees, Tilottama began to revive. Immediately the Prince saw through the open door two women (one of them veiled) approach with the guard. Seeing from a distance the stately form, the rhythmical gait and the graceful neck of the veiled beauty, the Prince perceived that Aesha herself was coming with her maid—and as if she had been bringing Hope with her. When Aesha and her maid came up to the door with the guard, the sentry asked the bearer of the ring,

"Shall I also permit these?"

"That's your option;—I can't say," said the guide.

"Well," said the man, and prohibited the women to enter. Aesha removed her veil and said,

"Sentry, allow me to enter. If you incur any censure for it, lay it all to my account."

Seeing Aesha, the guard was surprised. He bowed and said with joined hands,

"Your Highness, pardon your humble servant. To you no place is forbidden."

Aesha entered the prison. She was not smiling then, but her features having a habitual expression of smile, it seemed as if she had been smiling. What a grace then sat on the dark brow of the dungeon; it was no longer a prison.

Aesha saluted the Prince and said,

"Prince! what's the matter?"

What was the Prince to reply? He simply pointed with his finger to the prostrate Tilottama.

"Who is she?" asked Aesha, after seeing Tilottama.

"The daughter of Virendra Singha," answered the Prince, reluctantly.

Aesha took up Tilottama in her lap. Any other female in her situation would have hesitated—would have calculated, but Aesha at once took Tilottama in her lap.

Whatever Aesha did, looked beautiful; she could do every thing gracefully. When she took Tilottama in her lap, both Jagat Singha and the attendant thought, "how beautiful!"

Aesha had brought vessels of rose-water, sherbet, &c. through her maid. She now fell to reviving Tilottama with these. The

attendant began to fan her. Tilottama who had been regaining her consciousness already, now completely revived by the attentions of Aesha, and sat up.

She looked round, and remembered what had occurred. She was immediately going to rush out of the room; but her frame having been exhausted through the physical as well as the mental agitation of that night, she could not go; her head became dizzy on remembering what had taken place; and down she sat.

"Sister," said Aesha, taking hold of her hand, "why are you uneasy? You are now very weak; come now to my room to rally. Afterwards I will send you wherever you should like to go."

Tilottama made no reply.

Aesha had learnt all from the guide. Suspecting apprehension in Tilottama, she said,

"Why do you mistrust me? I am indeed the daughter of your enemy; but you should not therefore think me unworthy of your confidence. You needn't fear any discovery from me. Before the night is out, I will send you with an attendant wherever you should like to go. No one shall know anything."

This was said so sweetly that Tilottama could not entertain any doubts as to Aesha's sincerity. Further, she was now incapable of walking; nor could she remain with Jagat Singha. Consequently she consented.

"You won't be able to walk," said Aesha; "do you go supporting yourself on the maid."

Tilottama supported herself on the shoulder of the attendant, and began to walk slowly. Aesha too was going to take leave of the Prince, when he fixed his gaze on her, as if he had

had something to say. Aesha understood it and said to the attendant,

"Do you take the lady to my bed-chamber; and then come back to take me."

The woman proceeded with Tilottama.

"Farewell, for ever!" thought Jagat Singha within himself, with a profound sigh. So long as Tilottama was visible, he fixed his gaze on her.

"Farewell, for ever!" also thought Tilottama. So long as Jagat Singha could be seen, she did not turn; when she turned, the Prince was no longer visible.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DECLARATION.

When Tilottama and the maid-servant left the room, Aesha came forward and sat down on the bed. There being no other seat, Jagat Singha stood by.

Aesha pulled out a rose from her braid, and, beginning to tear the leaves, said,

"Prince, you look as if you had something to speak to me. If I can be of the least service to you, Sir, pray, do not scruple to speak out your mind. I shall be really delighted to serve you."

"Princess," said he "nothing avails me now. No, Your Highness, it was not for that reason that I longed for an interview with you. What I would say is this. Judging from what I have

been reduced to, I cannot indulge the fond hope of seeing you again; perhaps here we see our last of each other. Ah! how shall words express how deeply I stand indebted to you! As for ever requiting it, I dare not hope to do it, considering my ill luck. But if ever I again possess the power to do you a good turn—if ever better days dawn on me, do not, I pray you, scruple to express your mind to me. As a sister unreservedly expresses her wishes to her brother, do you, Madam, do likewise."

Jagat Singha's tone was so very disconsolate—so very despairing, that Aesha was touched.

"Don't give way to despair, Sir," said she; "the evils of to-day are removed by the morrow."

"I am not given up to despair," answered Jagat Singha. "But what have I again to hope for in this life? To resign this existence, not to maintain it, is my sole wish now. But I am unwilling to quit it in prison."

The pathetic tone of the Prince went direct to the heart of Aesha;—she was moreover surprised at this display of feeling. The Princess was now put aside—distance and reserve now vanished;—like an affectionate woman, with a woman's tender concern, she took hold of the Prince's hand.

"Jagat"—exclaimed she, looking up into Jagat Singha's face, and then stopped for a moment. She had addressed the Prince, "Jagat."

"Jagat," resumed she, "O why is this anguish in your heart! Do not look on me as one foreign to you. If you permit me I'd ask—Is Virendra Singha's daughter—"

"I cry you mercy," interposed he; "that dream has vanished."

Both remained silent for a long while, their hands continuing joined as before. Aesha bent down her face over them.

All of a sudden the Prince started, for a warm tear-drop had fallen on his hand.

Lowering his head, the Prince examined the lovely countenance of Aesha, and saw tears streaming plentifully down her cheeks.

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed he, in surprise; "what is this, Aesha? Why are you weeping?"

Without returning any answer, she gently pulled Jagat Singha's hand, and made him sit down beside her on the couch.

When he had sat, she again took his hand and said,

"Prince! I did not dream that I should have to bid you farewell in this manner. I can suffer a great deal—but I can never suffer the thought of leaving you in prison, under this extreme anguish. Come out with me, I beseech you;—I will give you a horse from our stables; escape to your father's camp this very night."

Had his guardian angel appeared before him personally, to confer blessings on him, the Prince could not have been struck with greater surprise. He was speechless from very astonishment.

"Jagat Singha! Prince! come, O come," again importuned she.

"Aesha," said he, after a pause, "you will set me free?"

"Yes, instantly"—replied Aesha.

Prince. "Without your father's knowledge?"

Aesha. "No fear; I will break the matter to him when you shall have been beyond his reach."

"But how will the guards allow me to go out?"

"This talisman will induce them."

She thereupon tore her jewelled necklace, and held it before the Prince.

"When the matter will come to light" said he, "you shall come to grief at the hands of your father."

"No great matter."

"No, Aesha, I never will go."

Aesha looked blank.

"Ah, why so?" asked she sadly.

Prince. "I owe you already nothing less than my life,—and I shall never do an action which shall make you miserable."

"Then must you persist in refusing?" asked she in a choked voice.

"Pray, go out alone," said he.

Aesha was again silent,—tears gushed out afresh from her eyes, defying her utmost efforts at restraining them.

"Aesha!" exclaimed the Prince in amazement—"Aesha, why do you weep, maiden."

Aesha was silent.

"Aesha," the Prince went on, "if you can well express to me the cause of your silent weeping, do so I beseech you. I shall lay down my life to remove it. That I have chosen to remain in prison cannot have brought tears to the eyes of Aesha. Have not thousands of prisoners rotten in your father's goal?"

Without returning any answer, Aesha wiped her eyes.

"Prince," said she after a pause, "I shall weep no more."

The Prince was rather sorry for not receiving any reply. Both hung down their heads in silence.

The shadow of a third person now fell on the prison wall, unmarked by those in the room. He came up and stood by them. After standing still like a statue for a while, he said in a voice faltering with passion,

"Princess! this is capital!"

Both raised their heads and saw—Osman.

Osman had learnt the particulars from his follower, the bearer of the ring; and had come in search of Aesha. On seeing Osman, the Prince became greatly apprehensive for the sake of Aesha, who might come by disgrace or reproof at the hands of Osman or of Katlu Khan himself; and that this was more than probable, the angry tone in which Osman had made the taunt, rendered clearly manifest. Aesha understood the import of the remark as soon as it was made. For a moment only her fair features grew crimson; but there was no other sign of impatience.

"And what is capital, Osman, I pray?"—asked she calmly.

"It is capital," said he in the same tone of raillery, "it is capital for a Princess to be at night in the company of a prisoner. Aye; it is capital for her also to enter the prison in perfect contempt of rule."

This was more than Aesha's spotless innocence could bear. She rivetted her eyes on Osman's face, and in such haughty accents as Osman never remembered to have heard before, said,

"It is my will to enter the prison alone at this dead hour of night—it is my will to talk with the prisoner. You are not the man to sit in judgment on the correctness or otherwise of my conduct."

Osman was amazed; he was still more angry.

"You shall see that to-morrow morning before the Nabab," said he.

"When father will ask"—replied she in the same manner, "I shall answer him; you needn't be uneasy on that score."

"And what if I asked?" said he in the same railing tone.

Aesha started to her feet, and for a while fixed her gaze on Osman. Her expansive eyes became more expansive, her lily-like countenance became still more blooming, her head with the raven-black locks slightly inclined to one side, her bosom heaved with rising emotion, like moss swayed by the waves. In clear, ringing tones, she said,

"If *you* ask, Osman, I can tell you that the prisoner before us is—the lord of my bosom."

Had the thunder burst there at that moment, neither the Rajput nor the Pathan could have been startled more highly. The Prince felt as if some one had illumined his mental darkness;—he now understood the meaning and import of Aesha's silent weeping. Osman had ere this surmised as much, and had therefore rebuked Aesha in such a way; but that she should declare her love in his very presence, had not entered his head. Osman was silent.

"Listen, Osman," continued she, "this prisoner is the lord of my bosom. While a particle of life continues to warm this frame, none else can hope to find a place there. If it so happen that to-morrow the ground of execution be drenched with his blood—" here she shuddered, "still, still, you will find me enshrining his dear image in my heart of hearts and worshipping it for ever and a day. If this moment is destined to be the last of our seeing each other, if he be released to-morrow, and

being encircled by hundreds of wives, cry shame upon the name of Aesha and turn it into a bye-word—still, still shall I remain his for ever, panting for his love. What, think you, I was speaking to him here secretly? I was telling him, I would win the guards over by soft words or by reward. I would furnish him with a horse from our stables;—and importuned him to escape at once to his father's camp. The prisoner himself declined to go away, or by this time you would not have found the least trace of him."

She wiped away her tears, and paused a little, and then resumed in an altered voice.

"But Osman, I have pained you. Forgive me, I beseech you. We cherish each other with affection; and my conduct looks like rank unkindness. But you suspected my innocence. Whatever her other faults, impurity has no share in Aesha. Whatever Aesha does, she can avow it before the world. Now I have declared it to you—if necessary to-morrow I will declare it to my father." Then turning to Jagat Singha, she said,

"Prince! do you also forgive me. Had not Osman touched me to the quick, the grief that knawed my vitals, would never have come to your ears;—nay, to any human ears."

The Prince stood speechless, his heart burning in anguish. Osman also was silent. Aesha resumed,

"Osman! I say again, if I have offended you, do you forgive me. I shall ever remain your affectionate sister. Do not, O do not, lessen your affection for me. As my bad luck would have it, I have plunged into this ocean; do not add to my woe by depriving me of your brotherly love."

Saying this, the fair damsel rushed out, without waiting for the return of her maid. Osman remained speechless for a while

like one that had lost his senses, and then returned to his apartment.

CHAPTER XVI.

"YOUR SLAVE'S AT YOUR FEET, LORD."

There was dancing that night in the harem of Katlu Khan. He did not, like the Mogul Emperors, celebrate his anniversary in festive mirth and gaity in the midst of his courtiers ;—his nature was intensely selfish, and ever craved for the lusts of the flesh. That night he was surrounded by his sweet-hearts, and was engaged in mirth and fun with them. There was no other dancing girl,—no other spectator. No one could go there except the eunuchs. Some were dancing, some were singing and some keeping measure ; the rest sat round Katlu Khan and listened.

Nothing that could please the sense was lacking there. You entered the chamber, and a grateful coolness spread itself over your body, on account of the odour of fragrant waters, which kept continually sprinkling. The splendour of ever so many silver, ivory and crystal vessels dazzled your sight. No end of flowers—here in garlands—there in heaps—and there again in *bouquets* ;—they graced the hair of the fair ones,—they gleamed mildly over their neck. Some carried the flowery fan—some were decked in flowers—some were throwing *bouquets* at others.

The odour of the flowers—the odour of the perfumes—the odour of the lamps—the odour of the fragrant bosoms of the lovely damsels themselves;—the air was sick with odour. The splendour of the lamps, the splendour of the flowers, the splendour of the ornaments, and finally the splendour of the side-glances darted incessantly from the eyes of the women. The music of the *vina** and other instruments swelled the air, accompanied by the sweeter, clearer strains of the females; at intervals the tinklings proceeding from the feet of a dancing-girl took the soul with 'enchanting ravishment.'

Look there! reader, how yonder female dances; so dances the lotus-embosomed swan when the waves are up. She is looked on by a circle of lovely, cheerful faces. Look where sits she of the blue attire—her cloth glittering in stars of gold—what a pair of expansive eyes! how deliciously blue like the sky!—what lightning flash in her side-glance! Look at the other fair one, who bears a diamond-star on that spot of her forehead where her hair begins to part. Do you see what a sweet forehead she has? Serene, expansive, clear—has such a creature been meant by Heaven for the harem? Look at that lovely brown girl decked in flowers. Do you see how well her floral dress sets off her person? Flowers were meant for the fair. Do you see yonder girl with cherry-ripe lips, which are at present slightly compressed. Mark how her bright complexion comes out from behind her glossy, blue vesture—so looks the moon at its full in the cloudless heavens. Do you see that fair one there with the swan-like neck. She is talking and laughing. Look how her pendants are waving. Who are you, my fair one, with such a

* A stringed instrument of the Hindus.

fine head of hair? Why have you let your ringlets down to your breast? Do you show how the snake twines itself round the lotus-bud?

And who are you, my fair one, who seated beside Katlu Khan, are pouring out the 'rubied nectar' into the golden glass? Who are you at whose 'bright, consummate' charms Katlu Khan is incessantly casting eager glances? Who are you that are firing his bosom with your infallible side-looks? I know that glance,—you are Bimala. Why are you pouring out so much liquor? Go on,—go on—more—you have, sure, got the dagger within your dress? Of course. How can you then laugh in such a manner? Ah! it is no common laugh. Katlu Khan is looking at you in the face. What's that? Side-glance! What's that? What again? See if you have not maddened the flushed Musalman! Perhaps, it is by means of your wiles that you have at once made yourself the sole mistress of his heart. And how could it be otherwise? Such a laugh! such a carriage! such a sweet, playful talk! such a side-glance! Again the cup! Have a care, Katlu Khan! And what can Katlu Khan do? With what a glance Bimala is offering the glass! Ha! what's that sound? Who is singing? Does it proceed from human or from angelic lungs? Bimala is singing with the singers. What a voice! what strains! how fine the measure! Katlu Khan, what's this? Who has captivated your mind? What are you gazing at? She is smilingly casting her side-look at every cadence; she is piercing your heart with more than a dagger's sharpness. Do you see that? The glance alone is bewitching and it is accompanied by music! And do you see how her head waves gently with every glance? Do you see how her pendants are waving? Ha! pour the liquor

again, pour, for God's sake. What's this? What's this? Bimala has risen up and begun to dance. How beautiful! what a manner! The glass! What a person! What a frame! Katlu Khan, my lord! have patience! patience I say! You are in a flame! Ah! Katlu's body is burning! The cup! ah! the cup! Ha! what again? Again the laugh! again the glance! Wine! wine! What is this, eh? *Kanchali*?

What's that, my lord? What's that?

The circle of women rose up with a chorus of laughter, and fled.

Suddenly the lamp went out; Katlu Khan cr'ed "Where are you, my charmer?"

Laying one hand on Katlu's shoulder, Bimala said,

"Your slave's at your feet, lord." Her other hand held the dagger.

Katlu Khan drew Bimala to her breast, and embraced her deeply. The next moment he shrieked out frightfully, cast her away at a distance, and sank in the bed. Bimala had sent her sharp dagger to the hilt into Katlu's breast.

"Vile murdress! damned wretch!" exclaimed he; his throat gurgled as he spoke.

"No murdress, no wretch, but the widowed wife of Virendra Singha!" said Bimala, and off she went.

Katlu was fast loosing his speech; still he kept up crying with all his might. Bimala too ran and cried. On reaching another room she heard some people talking. She flew like wind. She found some guards and eunuchs in the next room. Hearing the cry and seeing her flurry, they asked,

"What's the matter?"

"Death and ruin," exclaimed the inventive Bimala, "make haste, Sirs; some robbers have entered the chamber; perhaps they have murdered the Nabab."

The men ran off in hot haste towards the room; Bimala ran to the gate of the inner apartment. There she found the guard in a profound sleep through inebriation, and crossed the gate without hinderance. It was the same throughout. She ran uninterruptedly. On coming to the outer gate, she found the guards awake. One of them, on seeing Bimala, said,

"Who is there? Where are you going?"

There was new a tremendous uproar within the inner apartment; all were running in that direction.

"What are you doing here, sitting idle?" said Bimala; "don't you hear the noise?"

"What is it about?" enquired the guard.

"Confusion!" exclaimed Bimala, "the Nabab has been attacked."

Off ran the guards, leaving the gate; Bimala slipped out without obstruction.

When she had gone some way from the gate, she found a man standing under a tree. Bimala immediately recognised him as Abhiramswami.

When she came up, Abhiramswami said,

"I was extremely anxious. What's the noise for?"

"I have avenged my wrong!" replied Bimala. "We shouldn't tarry here; let us hasten to the cottage. I will let you know all afterwards. Tilottama is there already?"

"She is going with Ashmani," said Abhiramswami. "We shall overtake her soon."

They walked away hastily. On reaching the cottage soon, they found that through Aesha's kindness, Tilottama had just come with Ashmani. She saluted the feet of Abhiramswami with a low reverence, and began to weep. After solacing her, he said,

"By the grace of God, you have come out of the clutches of the sinful wretch. No tarrying here a moment more. Should the Musalmans trace us out, they will avenge their murdered lord by taking our lives. Let us quit this place this very night."

All agreed to this proposal.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST MOMENTS.

Immediately after the flight of Bimala, an official of Katlu Khan hastily entered the prison of Jagat Singha and said,

"Prince!" the Nabab is dying, and wants to see you."

"How's that?" exclaimed the Prince, astonished.

"Some enemies entered the inner apartment" said the man, "and have fled after striking the Nabab. He is still alive, but has not long to live. Pray, Sir, make haste or it will be too late."

"And why does he wish to see me at such a moment?" asked the Prince.

"I don't know that" said he, "I am a mere messenger."

The Prince went to the interior with the person. There he saw that the light was really flickering, about to sink into eternal night. Round the dying man thronged Osman, Aesha, his youthful sons, the partner of his fortunes, his mistresses, servants, courtiers, &c. The air was filled with wailing and lamentation; loudly wept almost every one of that crowd; the infants wept without understanding what the matter was; all were crying aloud save one. It was Aesha. Tears were trickling down her cheeks plentifully. She sat silent, holding in her lap the head of her father.

Jagat Singha saw that her manner was awfully calm, like a flame unfanned by the lightest breath of air.

As the Prince entered, a courtier named Khwaja took hold of his hand, and brought him to the side of Katlu Khan.

Addressing him as if he had been a deaf person, the courtier said,

"The Prince Jagat Singha is come."

"Your enemy, I die," said he faintly; "resign all anger and enmity."

"Very well," said Jagat Singha, understanding him; "I do so now."

"A request—promise," said Katlu Khan, in the same tone.

"What shall I promise?" asked Jagat Singha.

"Your hand," said Katlu Khan.

Understanding his intention, Osman took Jagat Singha's hand and placed Katlu Khan's in it.

A fire spread over Jagat Singha's body, but he did not prevent the action.

Katlu Khan went on,

"Lads all—war—O I die of thirst!"

Aesha poured the sherbet into his mouth.

"'Tis no use—fighting—peace."

Katlu Khan stopped. Jagat Singha made no reply. The former remained fixing his gaze on the Prince's face, expectant of a reply. Not receiving any, he said with an effort,

"Refuse?"

"If the Pathans acknowledge the supremacy of the Emperor," the Prince said, "I can promise to try for peace."

"Orissa?"—said Katlu Khan in a half articulate voice.

"If my endeavours do not fail," returned the Prince, understanding him, "your sons will not be deprived of Orissa."

The features of Katlu Khan, which had been before writhing in the agonies of death, brightened up with joy. He said,

"You—free—God—good."

Jagat Singha was going away, when Aesha bent down her head, and said something to her father. Katlu Khan first looked at Khwaja Isa, and then at the departing Prince. Khwaja Isa said to the Prince,

"Perhaps the Nabab has something more to say."

The Prince returned

"Your ear," said Katlu Khan.

The Prince understood. He drew closer to the dying person, and brought his ear near to the lips of Katlu Khan.

"Vira,"—said he still more indistinctly.

He paused a little, and then went on,

"Virendra Singha—O! I thirst!"

Aesha again poured the drink into his mouth.

"Virendra Singha's daughter"—

The Prince felt as if an adder had stung him ; he started and slightly drew himself up. Katlu Khan went on,

"The orphan—I am a sinner—O thirsty !"

Aesha repeatedly poured the drink into his mouth. But now articulation became difficult. He breathed hard and said,

"I burn !—I burn !—chaste—you'll see that."

"What ?" asked the Prince.

His voice entered like a thunder-peal into Katlu Khan's ear. He continued,

"Never saw—so chaste—didn't see—didn't touch—you—how thirsty !—O I die, I die, dear Aesha."

No more articulation. He had exerted beyond his power. His exhausted head fell down dead on her lap. Aesha's name was the last word which Katlu Khan articulated, as the flickering spirit went out into the darkness of death, and life and the world passed away from him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOSTILITY.

After regaining his freedom, Jagat Singha went to his father's camp ; and, as promised, brought about the conclusion of a treaty between the Moguls and the Pathans. The latter acknowledged

the supremacy of the Emperor, and were allowed to retain the possession of Orissa. For the details of the treaty, the reader is referred to the pages of the historian; and we shall not enter into them. Some days after the conclusion of peace, both parties remained where they were. With the view of cementing the new-made alliance, the chief minister, Khawja Isa, and general Osman visited the camp of Man Singha, with the youthful sons of Katlu Khan. They won his good graces by the present of fifty elephants and various precious articles. The Raja received them with many marks of respect, and dismissed them loaded with honors.

It took some days to break up the encampment. At length, on the eve of the departure of the Rajput army for Patna, Jagat Singha and suit went one afternoon to the Pathan fort, to take leave of Osman and other acquaintances. Ever since their meeting in the prison, Osman had shown a coldness towards the Prince. He now dismissed him with a few merely formal words.

In a sad temper of mind, Jagat Singha then went to Khawja Isa, and next to Aesha. He sent her word through a guard of the inner apartments, saying, "Tell her, I have not had the good fortune of seeing her, since the demise of the Nabab. I am about to depart for Patna, and the chances of my again seeing her are few. I am therefore anxious to bid her farewell before I go."

The eunuch returned after a while, and said,

"The Princess directs me to say that she is unable to see you, Sir; and begs you will excuse her for it."

With increased mortification, the Prince set out for his quarters. On coming to the gate of the fortress, he found Osman, waiting for him.

The Prince again saluted him; and was about to leave the place, when Osman followed him.

"General," said the Prince, "if I can be of any service to you, pray, let me know it. I shall be very glad to do your bidding."

"I have some very particular word with you," said Osman "which must not be told in the presence of so many people. Kindly tell them to advance, and follow me."

Without the least hesitation, the Prince directed his retinue to go forward, and rode with Osman. The latter called for and mounted his horse. After proceeding some distance, Osman entered a deep *sal* forest, in the heart of which stood a dilapidated building. Probably in former days, some rebel had taken refuge in the bosom of this forest. Fastening his horse to a *sal* tree, Osman entered the ruin, followed by the Prince. It was a deserted mansion. In the middle there was a spacious yard. On one side of it there was a new-made open grave, but no corpse; on the other, a funeral pyre, but no dead body.

"What are these for?" enquired the Prince, entering the yard.

"These have been prepared by my directions," replied Osman. "Should I fall this day, pray, bury me in yonder grave; nobody will know it;—should you die, I will have your last rites performed by Brahmins; no one will know it."

"What do your words mean, Sir?" enquired the Prince in surprise.

"I am a Pathan" replied Osman, "when our heart burns, we do not judge between right and wrong. This world cannot contain two rivals longing for Aesha's love; one of us must die here to-day."

The Prince now understood all, and became sad.

"What then is your intention, Sir?" demanded he.

"You are armed," replied Osman; "fight with me. If you can, clear your way by slaying me, or else lay down your own life and make way for me."

With these words Osman attacked the Prince with his sword, without even allowing him time to reply. The Prince was compelled to draw his sword hastily, and defend himself. Osman made repeated attempts on the life of the Prince, but the latter did not attempt to strike his antagonist, he only maintained the defensive. Both were masters of their weapons, and the fight continued for a long time, without resulting in the defeat of one or the other. But the blows of the Pathan made sorry work of the Prince's body, which was drenched with blood; Osman on the contrary was untouched, as the Prince had not aimed at him a single blow. Finding himself gradually enfeebled by loss of blood, and knowing death to be certain in such an unequal encounter, the Prince cried out imploringly,

"Desist, Osman, desist, I say;—I acknowledge myself vanquished."

"Ha! I did not know before," replied Osman with a laugh, "that a Rajput officer feared to die. Fight on—I will slay you—I will never forgive; whilst you live, Aesha will never be mine."

"I am not for Aesha," said the Prince.

"No, you are not, but Aesha is for you," said Osman flourishing his sword, "fight on—no forgiving."

The Prince flung away his sword at a distance, and said,

"I will never fight. You have served me in my misfortune; and I will not fight with you."

Transported by rage, Osman dealt a kick at the Prince's chest.

"Thus!" exclaimed he, "thus do I fight with a warrior who fears to fight."

The Prince's patience became exhausted. Hastily recovering his rejected weapon, he leaped forward, like a lion bitten by a jackal, and attacked the Pathan. The latter was ill fitted to bear the force of that tremendous onslaught; and he measured his length on the ground, borne down by the staltwart body of the Prince. The Prince got up upon the breast of his enemy, and wresting his sword from his hand and holding his own over his throat, said,

"How now? Has your craving for fight been satisfied,"

"Not while I live," returned Osman.

"Your life I can end this moment," said the Prince.

"Do so;—or else your mortal enemy will live," said Osman.

"Let him," replied the Prince; "the Rajput scorns to fear it. I would have killed you; but you spared my life, and so do I."

He then bound together the hands and feet of Osman, and one by one deprived him of all his weapons.

"Now betake yourself to your home in peace," said he, after releasing him. "Being a *Yavan*, you durst kick the person of a Rajput Prince, and it is only for this guilt of yours that I have reduced you to this plight; otherwise the Rajputs are never so ungrateful as to lay their hands on the persons of their benefactors."

Without making any reply, Osman mounted his horse, and galloped in the direction of the fortress.

The Prince let down his sheet in a well close by, and washed his body with the water. He then unfastened the reins of his steed and mounted it, when he perceived a letter fastened to the

reins by twigs and shrubs. On releasing it, he found that it was tied by a quantity of human hair. The superscription ran thus :—

"Pray, Sir, do not open this letter for two days ;—if you do so, the object intended by it will be defeated."

The Prince reflected a little, and decided in favor of the writer. He kept the note enclosed in his amulet, and giving a lash to his horse, rode for the camp.

The day after his arrival there, the Prince received another letter through a messenger. It was from Aesha ; but of this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

AESHA'S LETTER.

Aesha sat down to write a letter. Her countenance was serious and grave. She was going to write to Jagat Singha. She took a piece of paper and began. She first wrote, "Dearer than life !" She immediately struck out the expression, and wrote, "Prince !" In doing so, tears streamed down her cheeks, and dripped upon the paper. Aesha tore it, and took up a fresh piece of paper. She had not written many lines, when it also shared the fate of its predecessor. Aesha destroyed it also ; and at the third time finished a letter unsullied by a tear. She then began to read what she had written. While doing so, her sight was obstructed by tears. With difficulty she folded the letter, and delivered it to

a messenger. The man went in the direction of the Rajput camp. Aesha then lay down alone on the couch, and wept.

Jagat Singha opened the letter, and read as follows :—

" Prince,

" That I did not see you was not owing to any fear I felt in regard to my endurance. Pray, do not charge Aesha with want of endurance ; the thought will give me pain. Osman, you know, has kindled a fire in his bosom ; and I did not see you, lest I should thereby give him pain. That you should feel pain at my refusal, I could not think. As for my own pain, my happiness and misery I have resigned to the hands of God. If I had had to give you farewell personally, I would have borne that pain easily ; that I could not see you, I have borne like a woman of stone.

" Why then do I write this letter ? I have a request. If you have heard that I love you more than a sister, pray, forget it. I had determined not to express it in this life, but God has willed otherwise. But now forget it.

" I am not for your love. What I had to give, I have given to you. I do not ask for any return. My affection is so deep-rooted, that I am happy even without your love. But I must have done with this business.

" I saw you unhappy. If ever you see better days, inform Aesha of it ;—but should you not like to do so, do not do it. If your heart ever feel pain, will you remember Aesha ?

" People may blame me for writing you now, or in future. I am innocent ; and you should not much care what they may say. Whenever you like, write to me.

" You are going away ; you leave this place for the present. These Pathans are not quiet folks ; so that the odds are for

your having to come to this country again. But you will never see me more. I have decided so, after much reflection. Much confidence should not be placed in a woman's heart, which it is naturally difficult to curb.

"I intend to see you once more only. If you marry in this country, give me notice of it. I will be personally present at your marriage. I have kept some petty ornaments for the fair one that is to be your wife. If I find time, I will deck her person with them, with my own hands.

"Another request. When you receive intelligence of Aesha's death, pray, come here once. Accept, for my sake, what you will find in a chest inscribed with your name. Through the kindness of an affectionate father, although a daughter, I have inherited an amount of wealth which in a poor country might pass for much. Should it not be unacceptable to the race of Abnir, pray, take possession of it.

"The deed of gift you will find in the same chest.

"What more shall I write? I wish to write a great deal more; but 'tis no use. May God make you happy; but never feel unhappy at the thought of Aesha."

After reading the letter, Jagat Singha began to weep; and for a long while paced up and down the camp, holding Aesha's letter in his hand. Then he hastily took up a piece of paper, and dashing off the following lines, delivered the note to the messenger.

"Aesha! you are the glory of the fair sex. Perhaps it is the Will of God to render the world miserable. I am unable to reply to any of your remarks;—your letter has overpowered me. Know this much only that I shall ever cherish you as my dearest sister

The messenger took the note, and returned to Aesha.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLICKERING LAMP.

Ever since Tilottama took leave of Aesha and went away with Ashmani, no body could tell where she was. No news could be had of Tilottama, Bimala, Ashmani, or Abhiramswami. When peace was concluded, feeling commiseration on Virendra Singha, for his sad end and the deplorable circumstances that had befallen his family, both parties agreed to search out Virendra's wife and daughter, and establish them in Garmandaran. Accordingly, Osman, Kwaja Isa, Mansingha and others, searched for them diligently; but beyond the fact of Tilottama's coming out from Aesha with Ashmani, none could learn anything. At length disappointed in his exertions, Mansingha placed a trustworthy follower of his, in Garmandaran, instructing him to "search for the wife and daughter of the deceased *jaigirdar*; and should he succeed in finding them out, to establish them in the castle, and go to him. He would reward the official, and give him a *jaigir*."

Having disposed of this matter, Mansingha prepared to go to Patna.

Whether the dying words of Katlu Khan had produced any change in Jagat Singha's mind, could not be known. True it is that he spared neither men nor money, to find the women out; but whether his efforts owed their origin to a mere remembrance of the past, to the same motives that influenced Mansingha and

others, or to a revival of his former love, could not be known. Whatever the cause, his endeavours proved vain.

Mansingha's army began to break up the encampment. Next day they would march. The time for reading the note that had been attached to the reins of Jagat Sinhga's steed, came the day before the march. Eagerly opening it, the Prince read the following lines;

" If you righteously fear sin, if you fear a Brahmin's curse, please come here alone as soon as you read the contents. Thus much,

A Brahmin."

The Prince was taken with surprise. Once he thought, " This may be the artifice of an enemy. Should I go?' Next he remarked that the letter was written in pure *Devanagari* characters; and concluded it to be most likely as coming from a Brahmin. In a Rajput breast, the fear of a Brahmin's curse outweighs every other fear. The Prince accordingly decided on going. He directed his followers not to "wait for him, should he not join them before they marched. No matter if they went before: he could meet them at Burdwan or at Rajmahal." Having given these directions, he proceeded alone towards the *sal* forest. On reaching the gate of the ruined habitation, he (as before) fastened his charger to a *sal* tree. He looked around him, but found none, He then entered the ruin. There was the same grave on one side, and the funeral pyre on the other. A Brahmin sat upon the wood of the pyre. He had hung down his head, and was weeping.

" Is it you, Sir," asked the Prince, " that have desired me to come here?"

The Brahmin raised his face; the Prince saw it was Abhiramswami.

Wonder, curiosity and joy struggled in the Prince's bosom for mastery. He humbly saluted the Brahmin, and eagerly said,

"What shall I say to you, Sir, as to how much I have tried to see you? Pray, Sir, why here?"

Abhiramswami wiped his eyes, and said,

"For the present, I am living here."

The Prince had scarcely heard the Swami out, when he began to pile question upon question.

"Why have you wished to see me? Why, again, do you weep, Sir?"

"The reason why I have called you is also the reason of these tears. Tilottama is on her death-bed."

Slowly—gently—softly, sat down the warrior upon the ground. Then,

"Remembrance waked with all her busy brain,
Swell'd in his bosom, and turned the past to pain."

The first sight at the temple—the vow in presence of Saileshwara—the true love tears at their first meeting with each other, in the chamber,—the incidents of that black night—the face of Tilottama in her swoon—her suffering in the den of the Yavan—his own heartless behavior in the prison—and finally her imminent death in this exile; the memory of all, all these at once dashed against the Prince's mind with the fury of a storm; the former fire blazed out with a tenfold fury, and spread itself into his vitals.

He sat mute for a long while; Abhiramswami went on,

"The day on which Bimala avenged her widowhood by slaying the Yavan, I fled with my daughter and grand-child; and roved

from place to place secretely, for fear of the Musalmans. Tilottama's illness dates from that day. The cause of it you well know."

The iron entered Jagat Singha's soul.

"Ever since I have kept her in various places, and treated her in various ways. Having studied the *Nidana*,* from my youth upwards. I have treated many a disease; I know many an unknown medicine. But what can the doctor do for a patient suffering from a sorrow that has struck its roots deep into the heart? Seeing this place very solitary, we have been living in a retired part of this mansion, for a week or so. Providentially finding you here, I fastened the letter to the reins of your horse. I had always intended to bring you once more to Tilottama, to soothe her last moments, if I failed at last to cure her. It is for this that I wrote to you. Then I had not given up every hope of her recovery; I understood that if she did not get better in two days, she would die; it is for this reason that I advised you to read the note after two days. Now the worst is come. No further hope remains of her life. Ah! the lamp is flickering."

He again wept. Jagat Singha was also weeping.

"You must not present yourself to Tilottama all of a sudden," continued the Swami; "lest her frail system should not be able to bear the excess of joy. I have ere this given her to understand that I had told you to come here, and that your coming was likely. I'll now go and inform her of your arrival; you may see her after."

Saying this, the ascetic directed his steps towards the inner apartment of the ruined building. Returning after a few moments, he said to the Prince,

* Hindu Pathology.

"Come."

The Prince proceeded to the inner apartment with the ascetic. He saw that a room was entire. In it was an old, time-worn couch; on it lay the lean, yet still beauteous form of Tilottama. Still was she surrounded by the mild-gleaming lustre of her former beauty. There she lay in her loveliness, like the 'fairest of stars, that crowns the smiling morn with his bright circlet,' about to disappear from our blessed sight. Beside her, sat a widow, who was gently passing and repassing her hand over her body. She had no ornaments on her person; she was a dirty, forlorn widow. The Prince could not at first recognize her; and how could he? She that had been perpetually young, was now an old woman.

When the Prince came in and stood beside Tilottama's bed, her eyes were closed. Abhiramswami called her, saying,

"Tilottama, Prince Jagat Singha is come."

She opened her eyes, and gazed at the Prince; her look was soft and tender; there was not a shadow of rebuke in it. As soon as she saw the Prince, she cast her eyes down. By and bye, tears began to trickle down her cheeks, in a continuous stream. The Prince could not contain any longer; all bashfulness and reserve vanished; he threw himself down at the feet of Tilottama. and bedewed her flowery frame with his silent tears.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONSEQUENCE THE DREAM BELIES.

The fatherless, forlorn girl is on her sick-bed, Jagat Singha

is at her side. The day passes away, and the night. Again the day comes, and again passes away, and again comes the night. The glory of the Rajput race sits by the bed-side of Tilottama, and is engaged in tending her; he is incessantly assisting the bereaved, silent widow. Whether the suffering girl look on his face, and whether her countenance, (resembling the tender lotus weighed down by 'the dews of Heaven refined,') again sweeten with her former laugh, to ascertain this, Jagat Singha sits fastening his look on her face.

Where's the encampment? Where's the army? They broke up their encampment and are now in Patna. Where are Jagat Singha's own followers? They are expecting their master's return on the shores of the Darukeshwara river. Where's the master? He is reviving with the 'eye-offending brine,' the tender floweret that had been dried up to the point of death by the fierce, cruel rays of the mid-day sun.

The floweret did revive. Love is the only magician in this world; in curing love-sickness, your only physician is Love himself. Who else can cure it?

As a lamp gradually brightens up by a fresh supply of oil, as by degrees the creeper shrivelled by the summer sun, again puts forth bud and blossom by the fresh showers of autumn, Tilottama began to recover in the company of Jagat Singha.

She attained strength to sit up on the couch. During the intervals when Bimala was out of sight, she opened her heart to the Prince and related many an incident. She told him many things; she confessed to many faults on the score of unjust surmises; she told of many unjust hopes which had arisen and died in her mind; she related many a fair dream which she had

dreamt, waking or in sleep. One day she narrated the following dream, which she had dreamt, while lying insensible on her sick-bed:

She saw herself and Jagat Singha sporting with flowers, on a hill clad in the freshness of spring. She gathered flowers and laid them in heaps: she made two garlands, one of which she wore herself; the other she placed around Jagat Singha's neck. Happening to come in contact with the Prince's sword, his wreath was torn. "No more will I lay any garland on your neck," said Tilottama; "I will bind your feet with chains." Thereupon she made chains of flowers. She went to bind Jagat Singha's feet with the floral gyves, when he drew off a little; Tilottama hastened to catch him; he removed farther: Tilottama ran after him; Jagat Singha began to descend the hill rapidly. In the way ran a slender rill. Jagat Singha crossed it by a leap; Tilottama being a woman could not cross it in that way. Hoping to cross it at the spot where the brook was the narrowest, she ran down the mountain beside it. Far from growing narrower, the waters grew broader as she advanced; by and bye it became almost a rivulet; and then a large river; Jagat Singha could no longer be seen. The banks were high, and frightfully uneven; walking was no longer possible. Further, parts of the bank near Tilottama gave way and fell into the water with thundering noises. Below whirled furiously a whirl-pool, fearful to look at. Tilottama tried to fly from the place, by re-ascending the hill; but the way was impracticable. Tilottama began to cry aloud. All of a sudden, the horrible shape of Katlu Khan came out from the grave and barred her way. Anon the garland of flowers was turned into a heavy chain of iron; the floral shackles escaped her hand, and all of a sudden became iron shackles round her feet; suddenly her

body came to a stand-still, when Katlu Khan grasped her by the neck; and whirling her body, threw it into the torrent.

"Prince!" said Tilottama, when she had done, her eyes glistening with tears, "Prince! this is no idle dream. Perhaps the flowery chains which I strung for you, have really proved iron chains round my feet—the garland of flowers which I placed round your neck, you have cut off with your sword."

The Prince laughed; and taking out his sword from his side, and laying it at Tilottama's feet, said,

"Tilottama! here I resign my weapon to you. Pray, do you favor me with the garland once more, and I will with these hands, break the sword in twain."

Seeing Tilottama silent, the Prince said,

"Tilottama! I am not jesting."

Tilottama hung down her head in bashfulness.

Seated in another room, Abhiramswami was that evening reading a manuscript book in the light of the *pradipa*. The Prince came to him, and said in all humility,

"Sir, I have a request. Tilottama is now in a position to bear the fatigue of a journey. Why then should she undergo the privation of remaining in this deserted house? If to-morrow do not happen to be an in-auspicious day, take her to Garmandaran, Sir, I beseech you. And if you have no objection, do you make me the happiest of men, by giving your grand-daughter in marriage to a member of the house of Abnir."

Leaving his book, Abhiramswami started up and warmly embraced the Prince, utterly unconscious that he was, while so engaged, treading the sacred volume under his foot.

When the Prince came to Abhiramswami, guessing something,

Bimala and Ashmani had softly followed in his wake; and from the outside had learnt all. On coming out, the Prince found that Bimala had suddenly changed her former manner. She was incessantly laughing, and tearing Ashmani's hair, and dealing her blows right and left. Taking no heed of the beating, Ashmani was learning to dance from Bimala. The Prince stole away quietly.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONCLUSION.

The flower blooms. Abhiramswami went to Garmandaran; and with great pomp and *eclat* celebrated the nuptials of his grand-daughter and Jagat Singha.

Jagat Singha had invited his friends and acquaintances from Jahanabad to his wedding. The friends and relatives of Tilottama's father also came and made merry on the auspicious occasion.

Jagat Singha had given notice to Aesha as desired. She came with her youthful brother and some of the inmates.

Although she was a Musulmani, yet such was the regard and affection which both Tilottama and Jagat Singha bore to her, that she was welcomed into the inner apartment of the castle, with her maids. The reader may think that, weighed upon with a load of grief, Aesha could not enter into the general joy and gaity of the occasion. But it was not so. Blessed with a cheerful heart, she delighted all, like 'a bright consummate flower,' waving in the crystal brook and gleaming in the autumnal moonlight; her laugh spread lustre before her path.

The small hours had begun when the marriage ended. Aesha

then prepared to return with her attendants. Laughing, she took leave of Bimala. The latter, who knew nothing of Aesha's heart, said with a laugh,

"Dear Princess, now it will be our turn to be invited on the auspicious occasion of your wedding."

Leaving Bimala, Aesha came to Tilottama, and took her to a solitary chamber.

"Sister," said she, taking Tilottama's hand, "I go now. May you enjoy happiness and length of days. This only is my heart-felt prayer."

"And pray," said Tilottama, "after how long shall I see you again?"

"Alas! How can I" replied Aesha, "entertain the hope of ever seeing you again?"

Tilottama became sad. Both remained silent.

"Whether we meet or not," said Aesha after a pause, "but will you forget Aesha?"

"Would the Prince," replied Tilottama, laughing, "ever forgive me if I forget Aesha?"

"I am not pleased with these words of yours," said Aesha seriously. "You must never mention me to the Prince; promise this.'

Aesha understood that the circumstance that her future happiness had been utterly blighted for Jagat Singha, smote him severely; and the least mention of her to him would awaken his grief.

Tilottama promised to do so. Aesha went on,

"But don't forget me either. Pray, do not reject the things which I give you for memory."

She thereupon called her maid, and gave her orders. The woman brought in an ivory box, containing jewels. Aesha sent her away, and began with her own hands to deck Tilottama.

Although the daughter of a wealthy land-holder, Tilottama was struck with the rare workmanship of the various ornaments, as also with the brilliant lustre of their gems. With her own load of ornaments which had been given to her by her father, Aesha had caused these rare jewels to be prepared for Tilottama. The latter spoke in admiration of the jewels.

"Sister," said Aesha, "do not admire these. What tinsel are they in comparison with the gem with which you have adorned your bosom this day!" Here she strove hard to check her tears. Tilottama knew nothing.

When the adorning was over, Aesha took hold of both hands of Tilottama, and fixed her eyes on Tilottama's face. "Methinks"—thought she, "my love will never be otherwise than happy with the possession of this open, lovely countenance. When Heaven has willed it so, my only prayer to Him is, may the Prince be ever happy with this girl!"

"Tilottama!" said she, "fare-well. Your husband may be engaged;—no use of losing any more time in taking his leave. May God grant you long life. Wear these jewels. And my—your best jewel wear on your heart."

Her utterance became almost choked in saying 'your best jewel.' Tilottama saw that Aesha's eye-lids were trembling with the weight of tears.

Tilottama melted in sympathy, and said,

"Why are you weeping? Eh?"

Anon the flood gates were opened.

Without staying there a moment more, Aesha hastily left the chamber and got into the litter.

When she reached home, it was still night. She changed her dress, and stood at the window of her room, through which the cool air was blowing in. The sky more deliciously blue than the dress she had just changed, was studded with myriads of twinkling stars;—the trees in the dark sent a murmur as their leaves were swayed by the breeze. On the top of the castle, the owl was shrieking low and deep. Below the rampart in front, on the other side, and the wall of the castle down Aesha's chamber, lay the moat filled with water, holding silently and still the image of the sky.

Sitting at the window, Aesha reflected long. She took out a ring from her finger. The gem which graced it was the home of poison. Once she thought,

"I can at once quench my thirst for good, by sucking this gem." Again she thought.

"And is it for this that God has sent me into the world? If I am not equal to this trial, why was I born a woman? And what would Jagat Singha say, on hearing it?" She thereupon put on the ring. On some thought or other, she again took it out.

"It is beyond the power of a woman to resist this temptation; I'll cast it away."

Saying this, she threw the ring into the waters of the moat.

THE END.

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